

not have the option of starving the inhabitants. Throughout the twelfth century their most potent weapon was the use of sappers to undermine the walls. The changing balance of power in the 1160s allowed the armies of Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din to conduct longer sieges (often with effective use of heavy artillery). Turning to the Crusader castles, the author notes the strengthening of the outer walls and the development of the 'concentric castle' (exemplified by the massive Pilgrims' castle at 'Athlit). These new, or newly renovated structures were much better able to withstand prolonged bouts of bombardment, while internal changes improved the firepower of the defenders.

Ellenblum advances important arguments in this part of the book, and in Chapter 16 he shows the potential value of this approach in the interpretation of his ongoing excavations of the unfinished castle of Vadum Iacob. He is however, hampered by the paucity of scholarship concerning Islamic castle design and warfare in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The study of Islamic fortifications is in its infancy and it is to be hoped that current research at sites such as the urban citadels of Aleppo and Damascus and castles of Shayzar and Shawbak will help to redress this problem. While the author exploits a range of Arabic sources in his search for data on Muslim siege technology, this part of the picture remains somewhat undeveloped. Attempts to fill the gap with testimony from Frankish sources like William of Tyre are historically suspect. In the case of the siege of Jaffa in 1102 (p. 223), Ellenblum tacitly admits the unreliability of the William's account of the siege equipment of the Fatimid army and yet no such reservations are voiced concerning the same chronicler's observations on techniques employed by the Muslim defenders of Jerusalem in 1099 (pp. 199–200). That William wrote his history some eight decades after these events is clearly problematic, but one must also be aware of his likely biases when dealing with the activities of Muslims. It is surprising, therefore, that Ellenblum records uncritically William's spurious claim that during the siege of Jerusalem "two Muslim witches and three apprentice witches" threw curses against a Frankish siege engine. (p. 201)

Some minor criticisms should be noted. The author's uneven treatment of the Arabic citations in the bibliography contrasts with the care taken over titles penned by Frankish authors. Most Arab writers are not accorded their full names, book titles are given diacritics in some cases and not others, and there are mistaken transcriptions. Second, more illustrations (particularly ground-plans and elevations of specific castles) should have been employed to support the discussion of changes in the design of fortifications.

In conclusion, this is an important contribution to the study of military architecture in the Crusader period. The most impressive aspect of Ellenblum's scholarship is his ability to question long-held assumptions and offer promising new lines of interpretation. His focus on the dialectic between military architecture and siege technology in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem is especially valuable, and could well be applied to the study of Frankish and Muslim castles elsewhere in the Middle East. Perhaps his initiative will also encourage others to complete a deeper exploration of the Arabic sources for further data on the evolving technology of Islamic warfare.

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THE TANGLED WEBB: A LIFE OF SIR RICHARD BURTON. By JON R. GODSALL, pp. xxxii, 576. Leicester, Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2008.

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Though he did not merit a place in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* – he was not even on Strachey's short-list – Captain Sir Richard Burton was, nonetheless, a Victorian of undoubted eminence, one of the most colourful figures of the Victorian age.

He was born – not in a mansion in Hertfordshire, as he later claimed (the first of innumerable lies that he enjoyed telling about himself) – but in Torquay, in 1821. A gifted linguist, he taught himself to be fluent in Arabic and other eastern tongues. Following service in the army of the East India Company he embarked on a series of adventures that thrilled the mid-Victorian public. In 1853 he risked execution by journeying to Mecca disguised as a pilgrim, and three years later with John Hanning Speke he explored central Africa to discover the source of the White Nile. Nominally a junior member of the Diplomatic Service, he continued to lead a swashbuckling life of derring-do, and embarked simultaneously on a career as an author. His translations of the *Kama Sutra* (1883) and the *Arabian Nights* (1885) earned him further fame and a considerable fortune. Knighted in 1886, he died in 1890, in Trieste, where he was Consul. He now lies at Mortlake, in a marble and stone replica of an Arab tent. His wife, Isabel, lies beside him.

In a celebrated fit of religiously-induced hysteria brought on by his death, Isabel burnt many of his papers, including his diaries. She devoted the remainder of her life (she died in 1896) to writing his ‘official’ biography. Ever since then, scholars have been hard at work righting the many wrongs that Isabel committed in this work (for she, too, was an inveterate liar). Over the past forty years there have been no less than four full-length biographies.<sup>1</sup> Jon Godsall has now contributed a fifth.

Why does Burton continue to fascinate us? In part, no doubt, it is his controversial not to say scandalous life. Burton wallowed in controversy, and was a good hater. His quarrels with Speke were the stuff of scandal, even legend. But he clearly enjoyed the reputation that he earned.

Then there is his obsession with sex and eroticism. In India stories circulated of his predilection for young boys. A TV documentary shown earlier this year<sup>2</sup> made the infantile claim that Burton was a pioneer of the study of sex and even of ‘sex tourism’. To claim thus is to grievously misread – to read far too much into – Burton’s admitted *penchant* for casual sex (hetero- or homo-) wherever he could get it. Burton laid claim to a fantastic theory that homosexual practices were endemic in what he termed was the world’s ‘Sotadic Zone’, but that to its north and south such practices were sporadic and generally viewed with disgust. Mr Godsall is right to remind us that no less a genuine authority on sexual behaviour than Havelock Ellis (1859 – 1939) dismissed this theory as completely lacking any evidential base.

I have said that Burton was an habitual liar. So he was. In a painstaking forensic examination of his life Mr Godsall proves this over and over again. Many of the lies were harmless enough, it is true. What Burton did was to superimpose a fantasy life upon the sometimes exciting but often humdrum existence that he led, especially once his days as an explorer were over. But occasionally his lies were spiteful. He took enormous liberties with his various postings in the Diplomatic Service – procuring medical certificates that enabled him to claim sick leave when, in reality, he simply wished to use the time for further adventurings while living off taxpayers’ money. He blamed his sudden recall from Damascus (1871) on the Jews, when the blame was all his (even the Sultan had complained about him) and his wife’s. As a diplomat he was a total disaster, completely lacking in caution and good judgment. Isabel’s missionary activities (she was an ultra-devout Roman Catholic) did not help.

Of all Burton’s modern biographers, only Dr Kennedy is frank enough to label Burton as the anti-Semite that he undoubtedly was. Professor Colin Holmes and I have examined, in an article in this *Journal*, the circumstances in which Burton came to write a treatise alleging that Jews engaged in human sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> This essay is not cited by Mr Godsall, although there are other references in his

<sup>1</sup>F. Brodie, *The Devil Drives* (1967); F. McLynn, *Burton: Snow Upon The Desert* (1993); M. S. Lovell, *A Rage To Live* (1998); and D. Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005)

<sup>2</sup>Rupert Everett, ‘The Victorian Sex Explorer,’ shown on Channel 4 on 9 June 2008.

<sup>3</sup>‘The Burton Book,’ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.18, no. 1 (January 2008), pp. 1–13.

work to Burton's anti-Jewish proclivities.<sup>4</sup> But I find it odd that the biography contains no account of Burton's posthumous *The Jew, The Gypsy and El Islam*, other than to list it in an appendix.

Burton's marriage was a blessing and a curse. Isabel was a devoted wife, caring and attentive. Mr Godsall's researches confirm that Burton's diplomatic career owed a great deal – much more than he probably cared to admit – to Isabel's networking within Victorian high society. But on more than one occasion he engineered absences from her so as to enjoy the company of those of whom she certainly disapproved. Isabel's major preoccupation was the next life, not this one. She consigned so much of what he had written (but not yet published) to the flames because she wanted to construct an unassailable legend.

This book is not an easy read. Mr Godsall has collected a formidable amount of material but has not always made the best use of it. The biography contains a great deal of interesting but not very relevant detail (for instance, on Burton's forebears and on the circumstances of Speke's death). It mentions Burton's friendship with Bram Stoker but omits the inference – explored by Stoker's latest biographer, the Irish diplomat Paul Murray – that Burton may have been the model for Dracula.

But if Burton did arouse unspeakable desires amongst Victorian womanhood, this would not be at all surprising. Women swooned over the 'Iron' Duke of Wellington and over 'Chinese' Gordon (who did make Lytton Strachey's short-list). I have little doubt that they swooned over Burton too.

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PALESTINE IN LATE ANTIQUITY. By HAGIT SIVAN. pp. 429. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.  
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In spite of its poverty in natural resources Palestine has long been one of the most sensitive regions in world politics. This is of course due to the fact that Middle-Eastern monotheism arose there during the first pre-Christian millennium, which around the turn of the era became a major spiritual and ideological current in the ancient world, transforming the religion of Israel, generating the Christian movement(s), probably also the gnostic religions, and heavily influencing the religious development in Western Arabia leading to the Islamic conquest of the entire Middle East, including Palestine, and the final establishment of a monotheistic world view in the whole region.

The history of Palestine as a background for the formation of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity during the first two centuries of our era has often been written. Comprehensive surveys of the history of the area in late antiquity are less numerous. There are well-known substantial works on the history of Judaism and the Christian movements in that period but attempts to view the region as a whole are more difficult to find. The present work by Hagit Sivan, professor at the University of Kansas, aims at a comprehensive perspective on the internal development, mostly ideological, in The Holy Land from ca. 300 to 600 CE. In the Preface it is emphatically stated that this book is not intended solely for Judaica experts or for those interested in Christian Palestine, or just in Samaritans. Rather, it seeks to give a coherent picture of the complexities and diversities of one corner of the ancient world, which tend to be taught and studied in isolation in a diverse array of university departments: history, archaeology, Jewish studies, religious studies, classical studies etc.

<sup>4</sup>Mr Godsall has informed me (letter, 23 October 2008) that the article by Professor Holmes and me appeared when his manuscript was in the final stages of drafting and he "was not prepared to add anything, no matter how interesting and important".