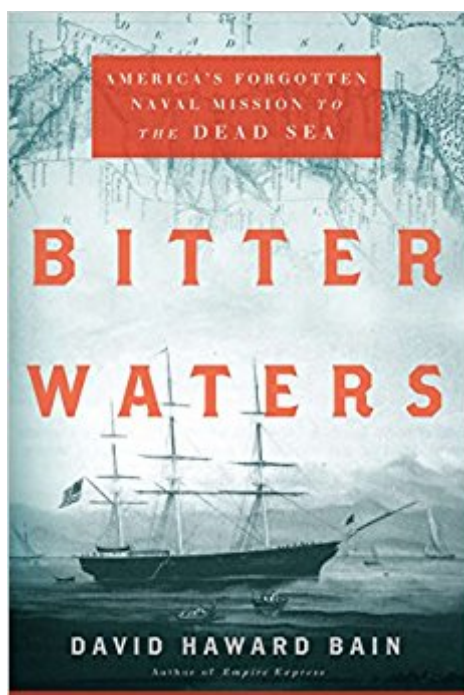


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Bitter Waters: America's Forgotten Naval Mission To The Dead Sea



Synopsis

With customary depth and insight, David Bain illumines the United States's nineteenth-century exploration of the Holy Land. To lead the expedition, the navy tabbed William Francis Lynch, an officer eager to enter the esteemed yet dangerous field of Victorian exploration. Like many of his successful contemporaries, Lynch was well-read, and possessed an independent nature, but in a man who also preferred organization to chaos, and with a character that tended toward the obsessive. The expedition would force a juxtaposition of the ancient world with the modern, as the world's newest power attempted an exhaustive scientific study of the waters of the cradle of civilization. Beyond its fascinating topic, *Bitter Waters* is full of broad allusions from the period that demonstrate Bain's deep understanding of America, and serve to make the work appealing for general scholars and lay readers. Heroically engaging unfamiliar terrain, hostile Bedouins, and ancient mysteries, Lynch and his party epitomize their nation's spirit of Manifest Destiny in the days before the Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for David Haward Bain: "Meticulously researched . . . Mr. Bain is more than a solid historian; he is also a good writer. A great yarn, skillfully told."--"The New York Times Book Review" "The definitive story of the heroism and heartbreak that produced a railroad, changed the landscape of the country, and altered the horizon of the nation."--"Wall Street Journal" on "Empire Express" "An intriguing, thorough study of a little-known scientific expedition to the Dead Sea by a mid-19th-century U.S. Navy lieutenant Bain amply extracts from Lynch's journal, depicting this

mysterious, desolate, intensely moving place. Also included are Dale's drawings, which hold an eerie, fanciful charm. Like the expedition itself, a work of stringent epistemological curiosity and research." --"Kirkus" Praise for "Bitter Waters" "Bain produces an engrossing narrative of the expedition that richly positions the mission's incidents within Lynch's Western perspective on the Near East. Wonderfully realized, Bain's account will enthrall seekers of history off the beaten path." --"Booklist" (starred review) ""Bitter Waters " illuminates this daring 19th-century exploration of the Holy Land. David Haward Bain, author of "Empire Express", paints a vivid picture of the ambitious, visionary seafarers and their bold adventure . . . "Bitter Waters " captures this fascinating moment in American history." --History Book Club (official selection)

David Haward Bain is the author of four previous works of nonfiction, including *Empire Express* and *Sitting in Darkness*, which received a Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award. His articles and essays have appeared in *Smithsonian*, *American Heritage*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, and he reviews regularly for *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Washington Post*, and *Newsday*. He is a teacher at Middlebury College and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.

David Haward Bain is an excellent historian and a gifted writer! He made me feel as if I was there. A very interesting history of the ambitions of the young West first meeting the mysterious ancient East.

I bought this before a trip to Israel when I knew I would be visiting the Dead Sea. I hoped it would give me some good background about the history of the area and even some idea of the geography and geology. Unfortunately for me, the book is more focused on the U.S. politics of this expedition to the Dead Sea, and I felt it was a little short on regional politics/history and geography. It's not a bad book, it just did not meet the expectations I had. If you are more interested in how the U.S. Navy operated at the time, and how military officers got their assignments, you might find it more interesting.

The 1840s were a decade of global exploration for the U.S. Navy, whose officers charted the seven seas, plus the Dead Sea. Strangely true, a naval expedition to the Holy Land in 1848 is the tale Bain tells. The idea for it germinated in the mind of Lieutenant William Lynch, who nurtured unrealized ambitions for command, a fascination with travel literature, and aspirations to the writing life. His mission approved, out he went, launching his crew in two rowboats onto the Sea of Galilee and thence down the River Jordan into the Dead Sea. Transported by Roman ruins, Crusader

battlements, reputed sites of Jesus' ministry, and remnants of God's wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah, Lynch in his journals and published account exulted in the region's religious nimbus as much as in applying his men to their ostensible cartographic purpose. Integrating those aspects of the adventure and Lynch's wary relations with Bedouin tribes, Bain produces an engrossing narrative of the expedition that richly positions the mission's incidents within Lynch's Western perspective on the Near East. Wonderfully realized, Bain's account will enthrall seekers of history off the beaten path.[...]

The novel starts slow with the trials and tribulations of one remarkable man's effort toward introducing the foundations of celestial navigation to the US Navy and founding the US Naval Observatory. While along the way documenting the various power struggles within the Naval hierarchy, contesting egos, the usual stuff. But out this a plan emerged to explore the origins, depth and composition of the Dead Sea, an expedition at least as ambitious as anything the US Navy had attempted in a foreign country at the time. The book offers a glimpse into interpersonal battles within the Navy which probably continue today.

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