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Andrew C. Jampoler A. *Sailors in the Holy Land: The 1848 American Expedition to the Dead Sea and the Search for Sodom and Gomorrah*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press , 2005. 344 pages, illustrated, maps and photographs.

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In this striking book we are often a long way from the sea, indulging a wide-ranging, discursive meander across a curious spectrum of subjects, from adultery to Oscar Wilde by way of sodomy and the service lives of mid 19th century American naval officers. While the book focuses on a naval expedition Jampoler feels no obligation to stick to his main subject. Lieutenant William F Lynch USN, later CSN and his command, the painfully literal USSS (United States Supply Ship) *Supply* take centre stage in the opening passages, and in a voyage that leaves no side street unexplored their origins experiences and services are recounted. Lynch, we discover, went on his expedition in the throes of divorcing his adulterous wife, probably aware of the fact that one of her lovers had been his own brother. How far these circumstances affected his command is uncertain, but the search for biblical truth in the Holy Land may have provided him with some comfort.

Lynch was a scientific officer. In an age when navies were increasingly anxious to reduce the key phenomena of the sea to order, including weather, ocean currents, magnetic variation and underwater topography science offered bright officers an advantage over their less gifted contemporaries in the race for promotion. When he

received orders to conduct his self devised mission to trace the course of the River Jordan from Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea Lynch was already 46, he needed promotion. It should come as no surprise to learn that Lynch's best friend was fellow Virginian Matthew Fontaine Maury, who would be the expedition's chief publicist.

Despite being only a hundred miles from the Mediterranean the Dead Sea remained mystery in the mid 19th century, protected by hostile terrain, disease and violent local tribes. Recent travellers had not prospered, indeed the Dead Sea was widely considered slightly more lethal than the heavily armed local tribes. Literary lion Alexander Kinglake's account was so inaccurate as to cast doubt on his ever having reached the spot, while Christopher Costigan and Thomas Moyneux RN had died. Lynch's small expedition, carried to the Mediterranean on the USS *Supply*, which he also commanded, comprised two small dismantling metal boats, three officers, a clerk, a mate, eight seamen, a doctor and a civilian. After transporting their frail craft to Tiberius they ran the rapids of the Jordan, and passed the spot where Christ was baptised. Here Jampoler cannot resist the temptation to poke fun at the Israeli and Jordanian claims that the event took place on their side of river, to secure the tourist revenue. Lynch conducted the full range of scientific data gathering, as long as his fragile instruments held out against the heat, dust and frequent accidents. He also determined that the Dead Sea was just over 1,300 feet below sea level. After completing their mission the men returned to Beirut, to rejoin their ship. While there Lieutenant John Dale died, he was the only fatal casualty of the expedition, although heat and dehydration on the shores of the Dead Sea left had affected the entire party. Lynch persuaded himself that he had found the fabled lost cities under water at the southern end of the Dead Sea, when it came to questions of faith his scientific credentials were easily set aside. Lynch's later career exposed further curious contrasts. He abhorred slavery, and yet threw up his commission to join the Confederacy – he died only months after the Civil war ended.

Within a few years local conditions had so far improved that the Dead Sea became a common tourist stop for prosperous American travellers, including Mark Twain and Herman Melville, and with that we have the key to this striking text. Jampoler writes

naval history in the manner of *Moby Dick*, a central narrative interspersed with frequent and occasionally mysterious reflections on aspects of the story that only add up at the end. Along the way he takes pleasure in demolishing the ill-informed speculation of self-publishing amateur archaeologists. In recovering Lynch's forgotten expedition Andrew Jampoler has re-united several branches of history, naval, regional, biblical and literary. If his book is often discursive the rewards for completing the journey are far greater than might initially appear; refreshingly different and thought-provoking.



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