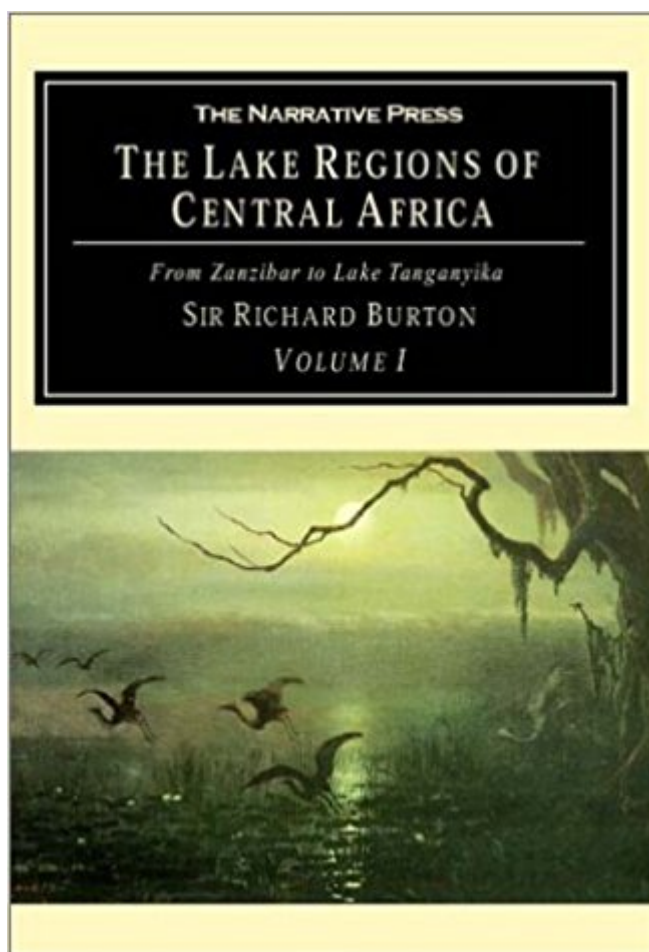


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The Lake Regions Of Central Africa: From Zanzibar To Lake Tanganyika (Volume 1)



Synopsis

Burton describes his three-year voyage throughout Central Africa from 1856-1859.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sir Richard Burton was a brilliant and complex explorer, linguist, adventurer, scholar and swordsman. The Lake Regions of Central Africa is the narrative of three years' hard travel from Zanzibar to Lake Tanganyika to try and discover the source of the Nile. The journey was often fraught with danger: "The first visit to Kaole opened up a vista of unexpected difficulties. My escort had been allowed to leave the ArtÃ©fÃ©mise, and their comrades in arms had talked them half-crazy with fear. Zahri, a Baloch, who had visited Unyamwezi, declared that nothing less than 100 guards, 150 guns, and several cannon could enable them to fight a way through the perils of the interior. Tulsi, the Banyan, warned them that for three days they must pass amongst savages, who sit on trees and discharge poisoned arrows into the air with such dexterity that they never fail to fall upon the travellers' pate; he strongly advised them therefore, under pain of death, to avoid trees - no easy matter in a land all forest. Even while he is battling man and beast, Burton finds time to make painstaking records of the history and religion, geography and biology, as well as the styles and customs, of the regions through which he passes. He is always very detailed about the appearance of the people he encounters. "Their favourite necklace is a string of shark's teeth. They distend the lobes of the ears to a prodigious size, and decorate them with a rolled-up strip of variously-dyed cocoa-leaf, a disk of wood, a plate of chakazi or rawgum-copal, or, those failing, with a betel-nut or

with a few straws. The left wing of the nose is also pierced to admit a pin of silver, brass, lead, or even a bit of manioc-root...They have also a propensity for savage "accroche-coeurs," which stand out from the cheek bones, stiffly twisted like young porkers' tails. Aside from having a hyperactive intellect, Burton was also fearless, and he experienced many things whites had never been privy to. For example, he describes some magical ceremonies he witnessed: "Becoming obese by age and good living, [the chief] fell ill...and, as usual, his relations were suspected of compassing his end by Uchawi, or black magic...The Mganga was summoned to apply the usual ordeal. After administering a mystic drug, he broke the neck of a fowl, and splitting it into two lengths inspected the interior, if blackness or blemish appear about the wings, it denotes the treachery of children, relations and kinsmen; the backbone convicts the mother and grandmother; the tail shows that the criminal is the wife, the thighs the concubines, and the injured shanks or feet the other slaves. Having fixed upon the class of the criminals, they are collected together by the Mganga, who, after similarly dosing a second hen, throws her up into the air above the heads of the crowd and singles out the person upon whom she alights. Confession is extorted by tying the thumb backwards till it touches the wrist or by some equally barbarous mode of question. The consequence of condemnation is certain and immediate death... These two volumes constitute some of Burton's best prose. They are essential for anyone interested in the history of central Africa, the culture and customs of the peoples who live in these regions, or anyone looking for a good adventure story. Don't miss other books by Sir Richard Burton, available from The Narrative Press, including Goa, and the Blue Mountains and Wanderings in West Africa.

Very rich in language . . . and thought provoking in the historical sense, this book is a bit wordy but acceptable reading.

The book is a detailed chronological account of nearly three years of difficult travel between Zanzibar and Lake Tanganyika, circa the late 1850's. Nothing escapes Burton's observation. He writes of everything from the local hairstyles to the price of pombe (African beer). He gives detailed descriptions of the landscape, geography, flora, and fauna. He writes of Arabs and the Eastern slave trade. He depicts safari life in the days of human porters and mules. He tells of the people he encounters, though his descriptions of Africans may be offensive to some. There is a wealth of information here, something for everyone with an interest in Eastern Africa, or exploration, or imperialism. The place names have sometimes changed from Burton's time to ours, as have the English spelling conventions of Swahili words. Anyone with any interest in Eastern Africa, especially

the precolonial period, should arm themselves with a good atlas and reference book and read Burton. Burton led an amazing life of exploration and scholarship [he wrote "The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah" after disguising himself as an Arab to travel to the sacred city; he visited Salt Lake City and wrote "City of the Saints

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Burton was a prolific writer who could crank a travel book out of a wrong turn on a trip to the post office. The story of his journey to the source of the Nile with Speke and their subsequent feud is fascinating, but this account bogs down in minutiae and is often outrageously padded with equipment lists and second-hand digests of others' travels. Burton considered himself a serious ethnographer but most will find the deep, unselfconscious racism which pervades the book off-putting. Illness and bad weather plagued the travellers and Burton complains at length about everything. Events of interest are few and far between and the outcome of the voyage was ambiguous; Burton claiming retrospectively that the interior lakes he saw in East Africa were the source of the Nile. Compensations include descriptive passages of great beauty. Of course this is must reading for anyone interested in the search for the source of the Nile or the controversy between Burton and Speke.

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