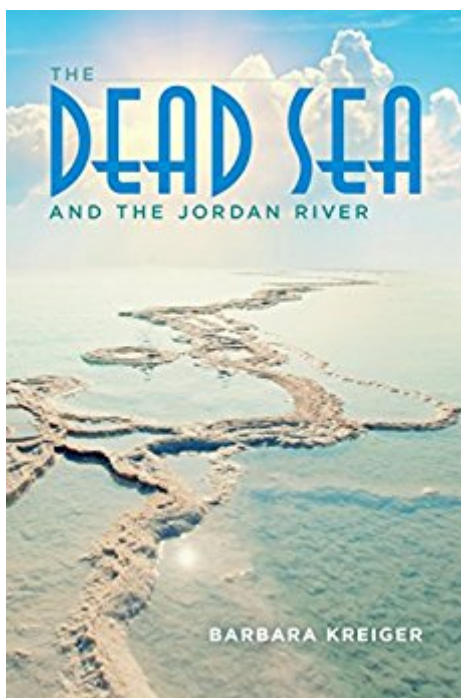


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The Dead Sea And The Jordan River



Synopsis

For centuries travelers have been drawn to the stunning and mysterious Dead Sea and Jordan River, a region which is unlike any other on earth in its religious and historical significance. In this exceptionally engaging and readable book, Barbara Kreiger chronicles the natural and human history of these storied bodies of water, drawing on accounts by travelers, pilgrims, and explorers from ancient times to the present. She conveys the blend of spiritual, touristic, and scientific motivations that have driven exploration and describes the modern exploitation of the lake and the surrounding area through mineral extraction and agriculture. Today, both lake and river are in crisis, and stewardship of these water resources is bound up with political conflicts in the region. The Dead Sea and the Jordan River combines history, literature, travelogue, and natural history in a way that makes it hard to put down.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For the right reader this will be an excellent book. It is largely historical context, particularly discussing a number of explorers and travelers who ventured there over a number of centuries, but

particularly in the 1800s. There's a fair amount of consideration of the river and sea as a resource divided among nations (the Dead Sea between Israel and Jordan, the river among Syria, Israel and Jordan, with the Palestinians as a sort of would-be participant). Both river and sea form part of borders, and the Jordan is of considerable religious significance to Christians and Muslims. There's also considerable discussion of economics, how the water has been divided and how the extractive industry based on Dead Sea minerals got started. There is a little on ecosystems and environment and rather more on the basic geology (which is rather unusual). The book ends with Kreiger mentioning some of her own experiences with the sea, some of her concerns and a rather surprising optimism on the possibility of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian state cooperating on managing the river--which she sees in some danger of extinction because of drawdowns for agriculture. For their great significance, the river and sea are surprisingly small. The Dead Sea is essentially a sizable lake, at 233 square miles (I just checked it). The Sea of Galilee is 64 square miles and the length of the River Jordan is 156 miles (it's worth remembering that Israel is not much bigger than the state of Hawai'i). The Dead Sea has over time increased and decreased in volume and gone up and down in level, and is currently decreasing in size due to about 95% of the Jordan's water, all of which historically entered the sea, is now drawn off. According to Krieger, the Dead Sea has shrunk by a third in the last fifty years. Kreiger plainly loves this area, and at times the book is eloquent about it, especially the colors. It's arid, hot and difficult terrain, and the extreme saltiness of the Dead Sea makes it of use in only certain ways--extracting salts from the water, and the medical tourist trade (which draws people because of presumed medicinal value of bathing in the water). The chapters can be read in whole or according to the reader's interest. Chapter 1 discusses early travelers, Chapter 2 later travelers, especially the 1800s. Chapter 3 delves into the shores and other areas around the sea. Chapter 4, "the life of a lake" is the most detailed about the sea's origin and form (it's only 11,000 years old). Chapter 5 details the life and impact of a Jewish Russian immigrant who set up the extraction industry based on salts in the water. Chapter 6. "A Lake Divided," covers the situation of the sea being divided between two antagonistic nations. Chapter 7 thoroughly covers the issues of the Jordan being a water source in a water-starved region. Chapter 8 discusses reclamation and the future. The notes and sources section is quite good.

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