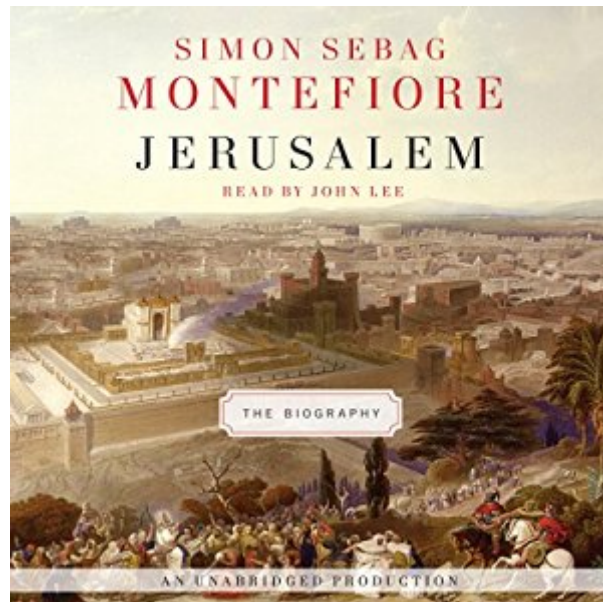


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Jerusalem: The Biography



Synopsis

Jerusalem is the universal city, the capital of two peoples, the shrine of three faiths; it is the prize of empires, the site of Judgement Day and the battlefield of today's clash of civilizations. From King David to Barack Obama, from the birth of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to the Israel-Palestine conflict, this is the epic history of three thousand years of faith, slaughter, fanaticism and coexistence. How did this small, remote town become the Holy City, the "center of the world" and now the key to peace in the Middle East? In a gripping narrative, Simon Sebag Montefiore reveals this ever-changing city in its many incarnations, bringing every epoch and character blazingly to life. Jerusalem's biography is told through the wars, love affairs and revelations of the men and women - kings, empresses, prophets, poets, saints, conquerors and whores - who created, destroyed, chronicled and believed in Jerusalem. As well as the many ordinary Jerusalemites who have left their mark on the city, its cast varies from Solomon, Saladin and Suleiman the Magnificent to Cleopatra, Caligula and Churchill; from Abraham to Jesus and Muhammad; from the ancient world of Jezebel, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod and Nero to the modern times of the Kaiser, Disraeli, Mark Twain, Lincoln, Rasputin, Lawrence of Arabia and Moshe Dayan. Drawing on new archives, current scholarship, his own family papers and a lifetime's study, Montefiore illuminates the essence of sanctity and mysticism, identity and empire in a unique chronicle of the city that many believe will be the setting for the Apocalypse. This is how Jerusalem became Jerusalem, and the only city that exists twice - in heaven and on earth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I came to this book as an Arab reader, growing up with songs, poems, and books written about

beloved Jerusalem, but never have I come across a book offering such a luxurious detailed and honest view and at such a scale! Written with remarkable neutrality and taking us through the diverse and rich history of the most disputed and news making region in the world! This comprehensive, and unpatronising treatment of Jerusalem's past is neither overwhelmingly scholarly to gloss over the gory (and fascinating) details, nor too hurried as to miss out important facts. Simon Sebag Montefiore combines the rare talent of total political and cultural understanding with a great and most eloquent narrating skill!"Jerusalem, the Biography" is a new sort of History, written as a biography, through the people who made Jerusalem, starting with King David and ending with Barrack Obama, over a span of 3000 years. Each section is about a person who, made, destroyed, believed in, or fought for Jerusalem, some are ordinary people, some are monsters and dictators. There is massacre, siege, blood, violence, but also beautiful poetry. The story of Jerusalem, is truly (as the author expressed) the story of the world, as well, of the Middle East, of religion, of holiness, of empire! I was thrilled to read about one of the greatest philosophers, the Arab historiographer "Ibn Khaldoon", about Suleiman the Magnificent, Caliph Muawiya, Saladin Dynasty, Druze princess and angelic voiced Singer "Asmahan", the Hashemite (Sherifian) Dynasty, and most exciting to read was some poignant poetry by Nizar Qabbani.

This is a remarkable book in several ways, and I have rarely been so truly ambivalent when writing a review. The fact that the author foretells such reactions in his introduction does little to mitigate these feelings or justify his work. On the one hand, the book is well-written and contains some fascinating detail. Montefiore knows how to do research and convey it in a readable and hence enjoyable fashion. I never find him tiresome, and I learn things constantly as I read. He has a way of incorporating details and then allowing the reader to see the bigger picture in a way that is truly admirable. On the other hand, Montefiore is a rare combination of incredulity and naive, uncritical acceptance when it comes to the sacred. For example, he tersely declares that Herod's massacre of the innocents "never happened" (when even the most liberal scholars grudgingly admit such an act would be most like Herod, and since erstwhile historians would have little reason to record the death of a dozen peasant children in a sleepy village, silence is hardly an argument), while on the other hand speculating in almost tabloid fashion about Mary the mother of Jesus remarrying one Clopas (when different Marys are as common in the Gospel accounts as squirrels in an oak forest). In some cases, he makes absurd assertions that no self-respecting New Testament scholar would even think (such as Jesus' brother, James, being one of his original twelve apostles--that James only rose to prominence after the birth of the church).

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