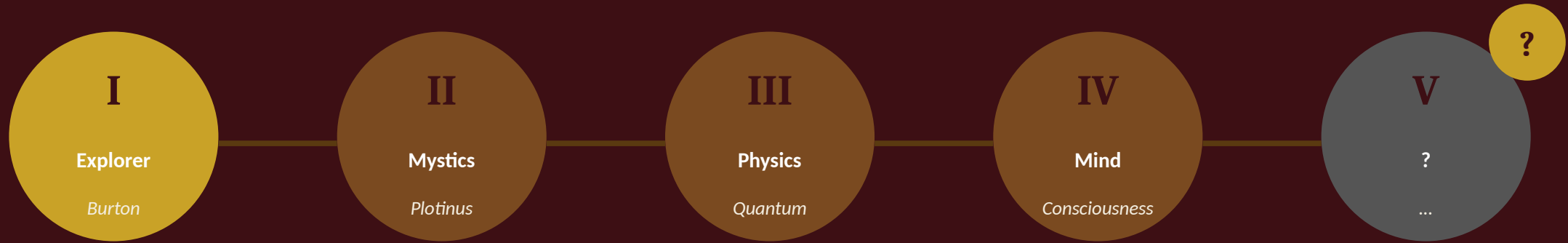


THE VALLICO ACADEMY LECTURE SERIES



*Five lectures by Mike Towler on five apparently unrelated subjects.
One question running underneath all of them. I'm deliberately not going to tell you what it is yet.*

Pay attention not just to what's on the slides, but to the shape of how each story unfolds.
There'll be a clue at the end of each lecture pointing toward the next one.

Tonight's clue comes at the very end, once you've met our first character properly.

THE VALLICO ACADEMY LECTURE SERIES

LECTURE ONE

RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON

Explorer. Linguist. Scandal.

*A man who lived as if attention itself were the only thing worth
disciplining.*



IN THE SPRING OF 1853

A man was standing in the Kaaba's courtyard, circling it with thousands of pilgrims, reciting prayers in flawless Arabic.

He was dressed as an Afghan physician. Some time earlier he had had himself circumcised to hold his disguise.

He was pacing out the Kaaba's dimensions as he circled it, notes hidden in the palm of his hand.

Discovery meant death within the minute, at the crowd's own hands: no authority to arrest him, and none to appeal to.

Before he was finished he'd be nearly killed in Somaliland, walk alive out of a forbidden city, come within one league of the source of the Nile, put the Kama Sutra and the unexpurgated Arabian Nights into English, fence at international level, write sixty books, become the most accomplished linguist in British history, and die in bed in Trieste, at which point his wife lit the most argued-over fire in literary history.

So, who was this person, and what does a life like that actually take?



FORMATION

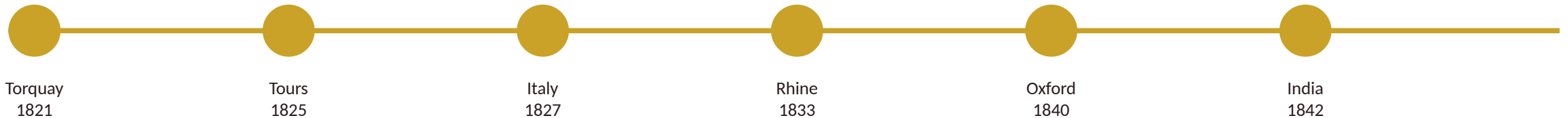
Born in 1821 in Torquay, to an Anglo-Irish army officer father who never stopped moving. The French city of Tours, then Italy, then the Rhineland. By the time most English boys his age had conjugated a single foreign verb, young Richard already had fluent French and Italian, and a working knowledge of Latin.

According to the rumour that follows him to this day, he had also picked up the rudiments of Romani from a teenage relationship with a Gypsy girl. Whether entirely true or part of the legend he was already cheerfully building around himself, it tells you something: this was a boy who experienced cultures, plural, as something you simply moved between.

A local footnote: those wanderings brought the teenage Burton to Bagni di Lucca, ten kilometres from this room. His sister Maria married into the Stisteds, the family who built the English church there, and her daughter Georgiana later wrote The True Life of Captain Sir Richard Burton.



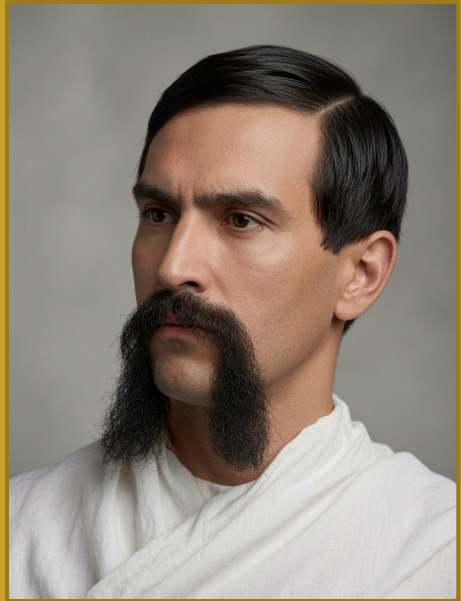
*He never went to school.
He had no peers his own age.
He had no home town.*



“He was always an alien wherever he went, and he confessed he preferred it that way.”

Burton, Autobiography

OXFORD, 1840-42



The moustache in question (AI restoration)

Burton arrived at Trinity aged nineteen, already fluent in French, Italian, Neapolitan, and enough Arabic to hold a conversation.

He found Oxford suffocating. A fellow student mocked his fabulous moustache; Burton challenged him to a duel. He kept a tame bear. He attended lectures he considered second-rate.

In April 1842 the college banned students from a local steeplechase. Burton went anyway. When hauled in, the others apologised. Burton told the dons to their faces that young men shouldn't be treated like children.

They expelled him permanently. As he left, he drove his carriage straight through the college flower beds.



Trinity College, Oxford

"Fit for nothing but to be shot at for six pence a day."

Burton's own verdict on himself, on his way out of Oxford and into the Army

29 LANGUAGES



European

- Greek
- Latin
- Italian
- French
- Spanish
- Provençal
- Béarnais
- Portuguese
- German
- Neapolitan dialect



Middle Eastern & South Asian

- Arabic
- Persian (Farsi)
- Hindustani
- Sanskrit
- Gujarati
- Punjabi
- Sindhi
- Marathi
- Telugu
- Toda



Other & Dialects

- Pashto
- Somali
- Swahili
- Amharic
- Hebrew
- Aramaic
- Turkish
- Armenian
- Icelandic
- + 11 further dialects

Burton didn't study languages: he inhabited them. He learned Hindustani by living in the bazaar, not a classroom.

** Also attributed: Romani (learned informally in adolescence, mentioned in his own writings) and Wagiriama (East African coast). Some scholars count 30–31 languages total.*

A NOTE ON METHOD

Burton believed you could not truly learn a language from a textbook. You had to live inside it.

He rented rooms in the Indian bazaar, dressed as a local merchant, shopped in the market, ate with Indian families.

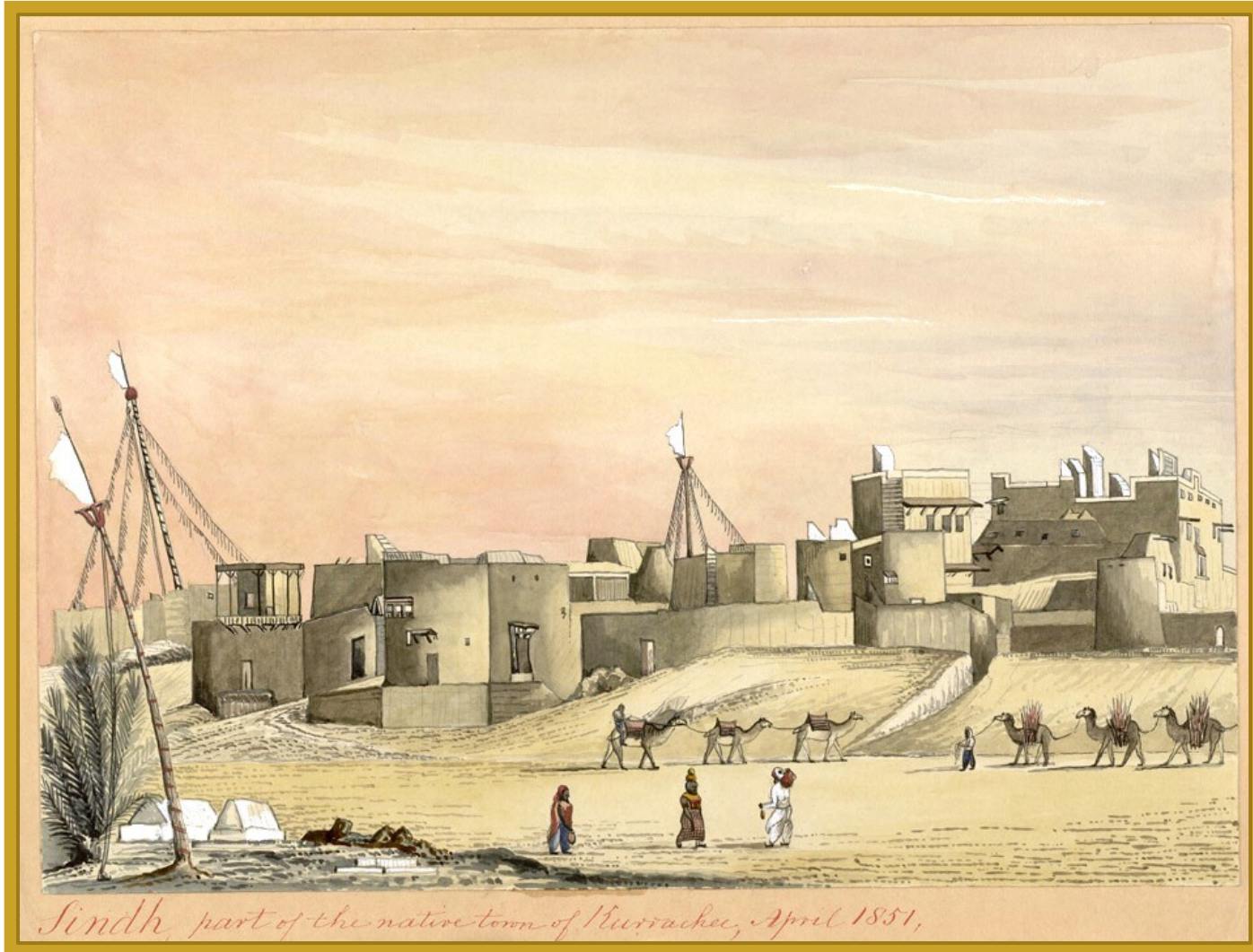
He also kept forty pet monkeys of different species, gave each a title (chaplain, secretary, agent) and tried to learn their language at the same time. He claimed to have catalogued sixty distinct words and calls before the notes were lost in a fire.

Even his hobbies were research projects.



Living the part (AI restoration)

KARACHI, 1845



Sindh: part of the native town of Kurrachee, April 1851

Burton reached India in 1842, aged twenty-one, an officer of the East India Company's Bombay army, and was posted to newly conquered Sindh under General Sir Charles Napier, where his freak gift for languages soon made him a surveyor, an interpreter, and an intelligence officer working in native disguise.

Napier needs intelligence on male brothels near the cantonment, frequented by British soldiers.

He picks Burton, the only officer who can pass as a native and write a report without getting caught.

But first, two stories about the General.

GENERAL SIR CHARLES NAPIER

Before the brothel story, you need to know who Napier was. When local priests defended suttee (the burning of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres) as an ancient custom that must be respected, his reply was:

“Be it so. This burning of widows is your custom; prepare the funeral pile. But my nation also has a custom. When men burn women alive, we hang them, and confiscate all their property. My carpenters shall therefore erect gibbets on which to hang all concerned when the widow is consumed. Let us all act according to our national customs.”

No further suttee took place in his jurisdiction.

Napier described Burton as the most remarkable officer he had ever commanded. Which tells you something about both of them.



General Sir Charles Napier, Commander, Sindh
(AI-restored photograph)

A BONUS STORY

“Peccavi”

I have sinned. / I have Sindh.

You may have heard that Napier announced his conquest of Sindh with the most famous one-word military dispatch in history: the Latin pun. He didn't write it.

The actual author was a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, Catherine Winkworth, who made the joke to her Latin tutor. He sent it in 1844 to the young satirical magazine Punch (founded three years earlier), which printed it as fact, and the whole Empire believed their general had made history's cleverest one-liner, when a teenager in Manchester had.



Sindh, between Balochistan and India; Karachi on the coast (map: freeworldmaps.net)

THE REPORT

Burton went into the male brothels, conducted a thorough survey, and wrote it all up: locations, prices, clientele, management structure.

Napier kept it out of Bombay for as long as he governed Sindh. In 1847 his civilian successor found it in the files and forwarded it, recommending Burton's dismissal. He survived, because he had acted under orders; his reputation did not.

The document itself has never been found; claims about what it contained, including Burton's personal participation, are inference. But it cost him the postings he had earned, and it followed him out of India.

He came home from India with fluent Arabic, a completed manuscript on falconry, a taste for hashish, and an idea.



In character as Mirza Abdullah (AI-restored photograph)

THE IDEA

He had been studying Arabic for years.

He had learned to pass as a native in India.

He had read every European account of the holy cities of Islam, and noticed that every one of them was wrong about something fundamental, because every one of them had been written by someone who had never actually been inside.

He decided he would go in.



View of Al-Madinah, drawn by Burton himself



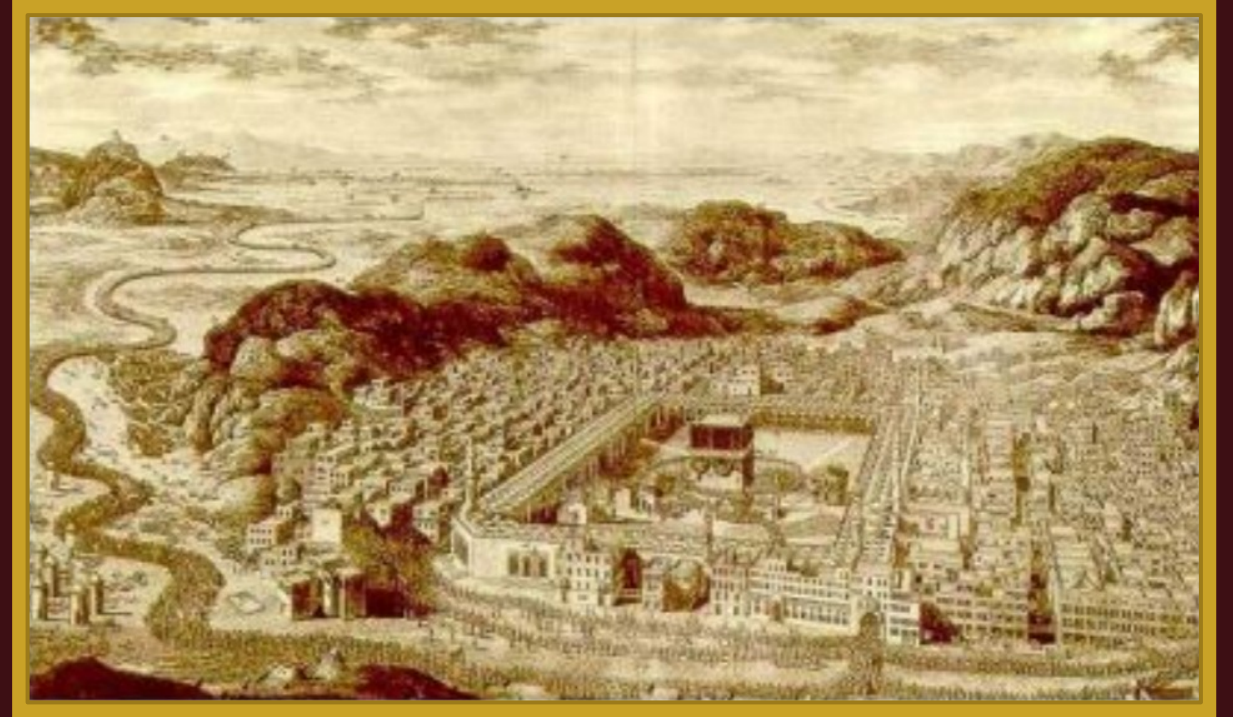
The route: Suez to Al-Madinah, Meccah, and back (from Burton's Personal Narrative)

MECCA

1853

He had learned a quarter of the Quran by heart. He had stained his skin with henna. He had practised every gesture of prayer until it was reflex.

Now he walked into the most forbidden city on earth, where discovery meant death.



Bird's-eye view of Mecca, 19th-century engraving

THE PERFECT DISGUISE

Burton spent years preparing to pass as a Muslim pilgrim, not the amateur disguise of a tourist, but total immersion.

He learned Arabic to near-native fluency, studied Islamic law and ritual in minute detail, practised the five daily prayers until every gesture was automatic.

He adopted the persona of Mirza Abdullah of Bushire, a Persian doctor and Dervish, the identity he had worn for years in India; in Egypt, judging a Persian too conspicuous on the road to Mecca, he restyled himself as a wandering Afghan dervish and doctor. He had himself circumcised to remove the last risk.

For his journal, he recorded everything in private shorthand in the dark by touch, unable to be seen writing at all.



As Mirza Abdullah, the Persian doctor and Dervish (AI-restored photograph)

"He was a white man of the deepest dye."

fellow explorer Wilfrid Blunt, on Burton's capacity for disguise



In Arab dress for the pilgrimage (AI-enhanced drawing)

INSIDE THE KAABA

Only Muslims may enter Mecca. To enter the Kaaba itself (the black stone cube at the centre of the Grand Mosque, the holiest point in Islam) while a non-believer in disguise was an act of extraordinary, foolhardy nerve.

Burton did it. He measured the interior with a tape concealed in his robes. He counted the pillars. He noted the decorations. He filed it all in his memory, and wrote it up later from his shorthand notes.

He also completed the full Hajj for real, meaning he was now formally entitled to call himself Hajji, and to wear the green turban, for the rest of his life.

A British Army officer, baptised in the Church of England, who had earned by the actual rules of the religion the right to one of Islam's own honorific titles. Nobody else in the British Empire could say that.

Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah, published 1855: a bestseller, still in print.



Measuring the interior, by tape and nerve (AI-imagined scene)

HARAR & SOMALILAND

1854-55

First European to enter the forbidden city of Harar. Which was impressive.

The return journey less so: reuniting with his companions Speke, Herne and Stroyan at the port of Berbera in Somaliland, their camp was attacked and something terrible happened.



7. BURTON'S JOURNEY TO HARAR, 1854-5

HARAR, JANUARY 1855



Harar was forbidden to Christians under a prophecy: the city would fall the moment a white Christian entered. No European had ever gone in and come out alive.

Burton went in alone, in disguise, openly announced who he was once retreat wasn't an option, and was received, nervously, by the Emir. Ten days as, in his own words, 'an officially honoured guest who was, in reality, a prisoner.'

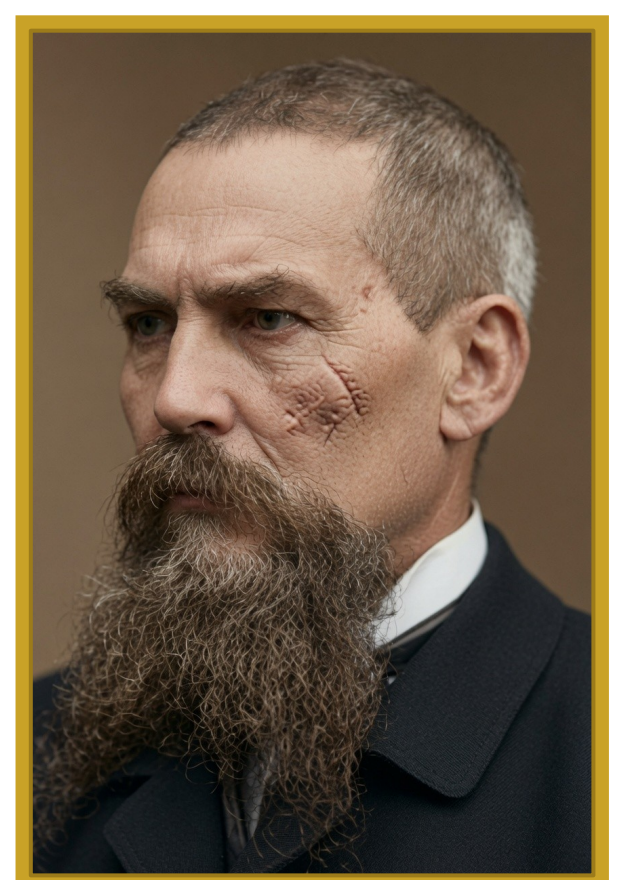
He left alive. The prophecy was wrong.

Riding for the forbidden city (AI-imagined scene)

BERBERA, APRIL 1855



The Berbera attack, 19 April 1855



The scar from Berbera, carried for life (AI restoration)

200 Somali warriors. Stroyan killed. Speke stabbed eleven times. Burton took a javelin straight through both cheeks, and ran for his life with the weapon still skewered through his head.

He carried the scar for the rest of his life. He never once tried to hide it.

THE BLANK SPACE

AFRICA, 1856

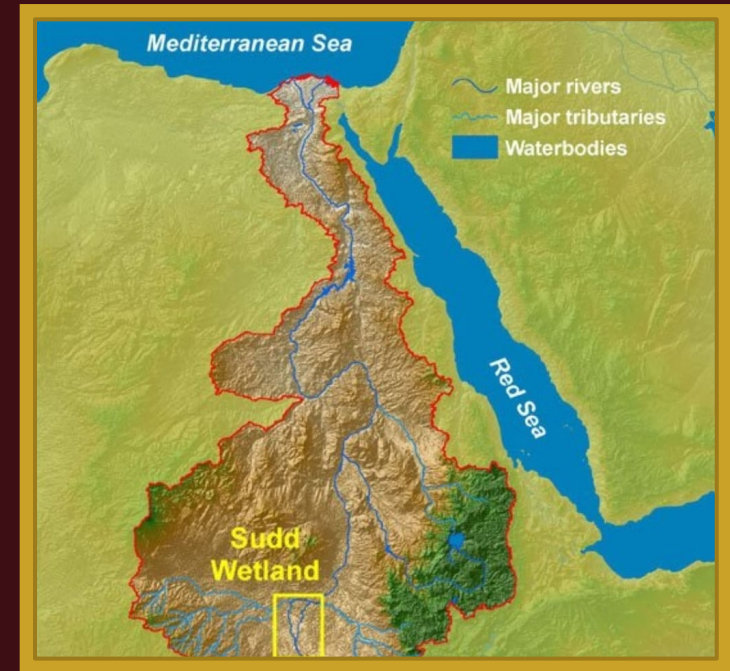
Everyone knew the Nile, the longest river in the world, began somewhere in the African interior.

Nobody had been there and come back.

The Royal Geographical Society commissioned Burton to change that.

It wasn't for lack of trying. Around AD 61 the emperor Nero sent soldiers up the Nile from Meroë to find its source. They reached the Sudd: a swamp the size of England, where the river disperses into papyrus and floating weed until boats can make no headway at all. Even the locals could go no further. The Romans turned back, and for the next eighteen centuries, so did everybody else.

Burton's plan: don't fight the swamp. Go in round the back, from Zanzibar, and reach the lakes overland from the east.



The Nile down to the Sudd wetland



Nero's men meet the Sudd (AI-imagined scene)

WHAT EUROPE KNEW IN 1850



Map of Africa, c. 1820 (James Wyld)



The coasts: well mapped.



The Nile north of Khartoum: known.

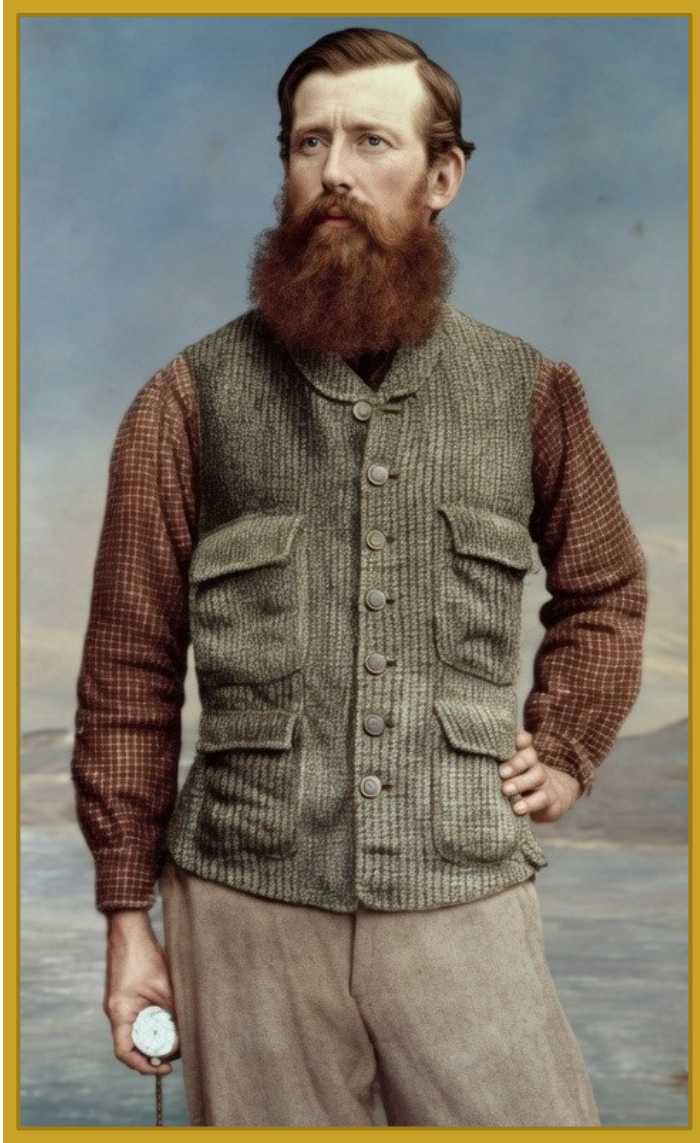


The interior lakes region: entirely blank.



The source of the Nile: 2,000 years of speculation, zero confirmed knowledge.

The word UNEXPLORED was printed across half the continent. In 1856, that word was an invitation.



John Hanning Speke (AI-restored photograph)

JOHN HANNING SPEKE

Burton's companion in Somaliland, the man stabbed eleven times at Berbera. He survived, recovered, and asked to come along again.

A very different personality. Where Burton was a linguist, scholar and sensualist, Speke was a soldier and hunter: methodical, literal-minded, intensely competitive.

The two men had a peculiar relationship from the start: mutual respect, mutual irritation, and a slowly accumulating rivalry that would eventually destroy their friendship and consume Victorian geography for a decade.

Their expedition departed Zanzibar in June 1857.

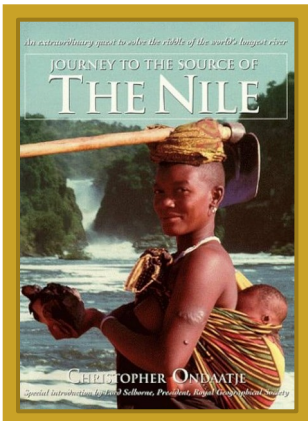
THREE WEEKS NORTH

Burton ill at Tabora, agreed to let Speke make a short reconnaissance northward.

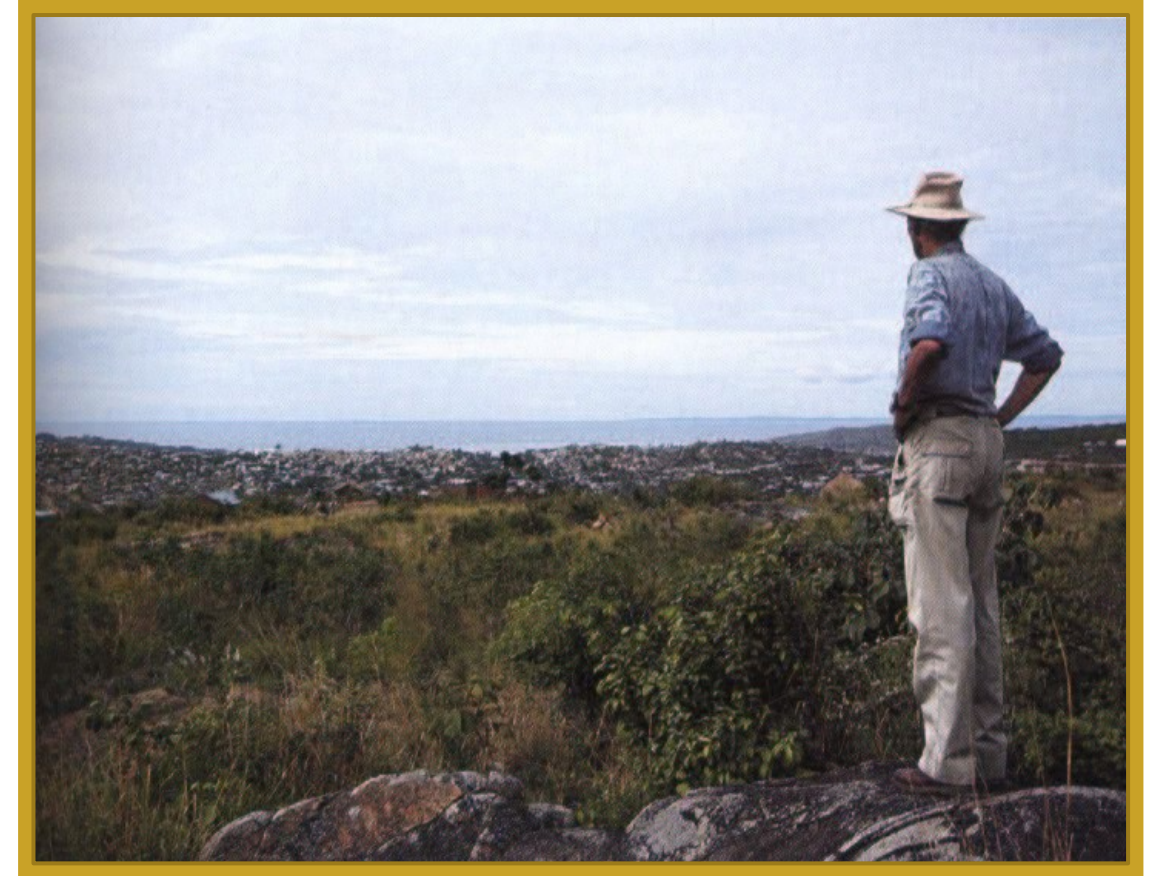
Three weeks' march north, Speke crested a ridge and saw an enormous lake. He named it Victoria.

He was certain, immediately and without any supporting evidence, that this was the source of the Nile. He returned and told Burton. Burton was sceptical: no measurements, no circumnavigation, no data.

On the journey home, Speke arrived first and went straight to the Royal Geographical Society to announce the discovery before Burton could respond.



Christopher Ondaatje, Journey to the Source of the Nile (1998): he retraced the whole route himself. A copy lives in the Academy Burton Library upstairs.



Speke's viewpoint above Lake Victoria (Mwanza), revisited by Christopher Ondaatje

THE NILE DUEL



Burton around the time of the debate (AI restoration)

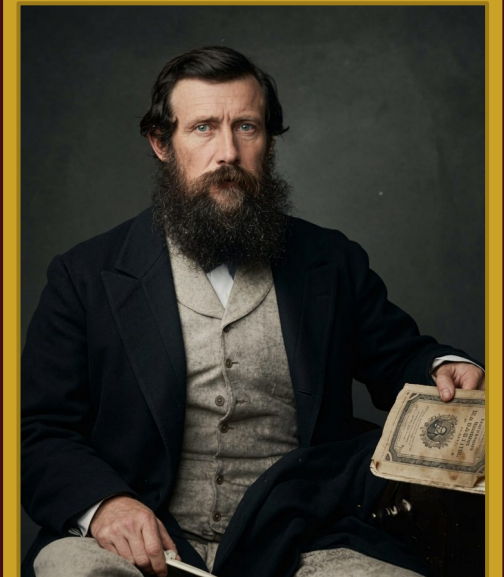
BURTON

Victoria may be several lakes, not one: he never sailed round it. And he left the river for long stretches on the way home. Unproven.

VS

SPEKE

I went back with Grant, walked up Victoria's western flank, and at Ripon Falls I watched the Nile pour out of the lake. "The Nile is settled."



Speke around the time of the debate (AI restoration)

Six years passed between Speke's first sight of Lake Victoria (1858) and his final, fatal encounter with Burton. The Royal Geographical Society backed Speke, not Burton, and sent him out again with James Grant (1860-1863). A debate was convened at Bath to judge what that second expedition had, and had not, proved.

September 1864: the two were due to debate publicly at the British Association in Bath. The day before, sitting near each other at a preliminary lecture, Speke stood and said, "I can't stand this any longer", and walked out. That afternoon he went partridge shooting. Climbing a low stone wall, his gun went off. He was dead within minutes. The inquest ruled accident; Burton encouraged people to believe otherwise for the rest of his life.

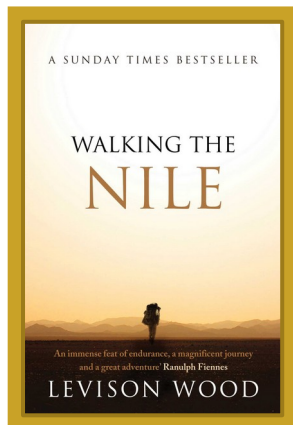
THE REAL ENDING

Here's the part the Victorians never found out.

Neither man was right. Speke was correct that Lake Victoria feeds the White Nile, but a lake isn't a source. It's a reservoir, fed by rivers. The largest of those rivers is the Kagera.

Traced back through Rwanda and Burundi, the furthest source is a small stream called the Rukarara, rising in the Nyungwe Forest, marked today by nothing more dramatic than this signboard over a patch of muddy ground.

Two brilliant men destroyed their friendship, one possibly his life, over a question that had no clean answer at the spot either of them was standing on. The actual source lay 690 km (429 miles) further west the whole time, measured from where the Kagera flows into Lake Victoria, in a forest neither of them ever reached.

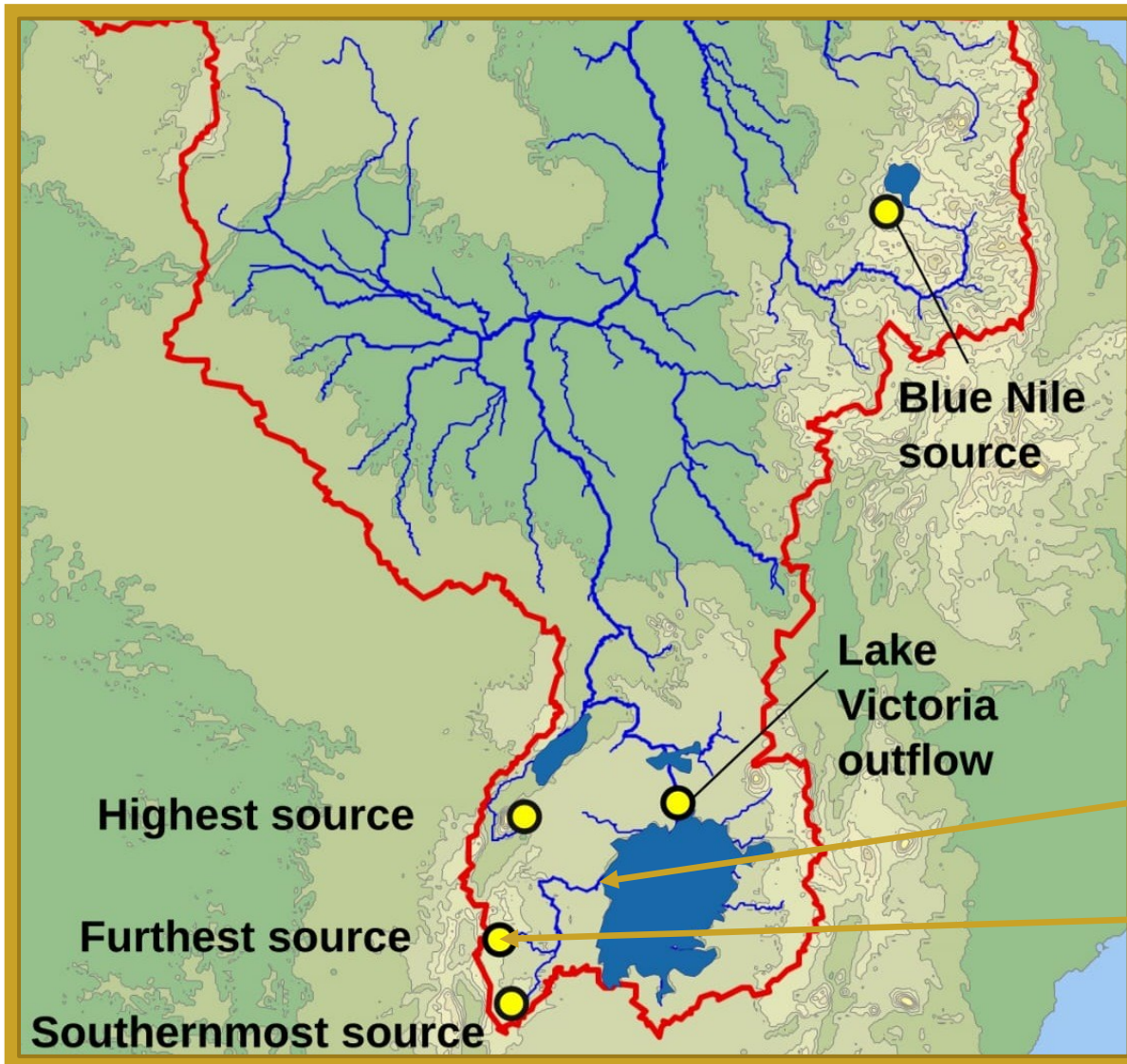


In 2013–14 Levison Wood became the first person to walk the Nile's entire length, from this signboard to the Mediterranean (although he was forced by civil war to skip a stretch of South Sudan, which must have really pissed him off). The walk became a book and a television series: Walking the Nile.



The furthest source of the Nile, Nyungwe Forest, Rwanda

THE TRUE SOURCE



Speke's lake was real. The source was not where either man was standing.

The Kagera feeds Lake Victoria from the west.

Its furthest headwater is the Rukarara, in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest.

The Nile basin, southern end: Lake Victoria and the rivers that feed it

THE MISSING YEARS



1860

Crossed America by stagecoach to Salt Lake City, met Brigham Young: *The City of the Saints*



1861-65

Consul in Fernando Po, West Africa. So lethal a climate it was considered a punishment posting. Explored Dahomey, met the King. *Abeokuta and the Camaroons Mountain; Wanderings in West Africa; A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome*



1865-69

Santos, Brazil. Canoed the São Francisco River. Visited front lines of the Paraguayan War, twice. *Exploration of the Highlands of the Brazil, Letters from the Battlefields of Paraguay*



1869-71

Damascus. Finally, the Arabic-speaking posting he'd always wanted. Recalled in 1871: he had made enemies of the moneylenders, the Ottoman governor, and his own ambassador, all at once. *Unexplored Syria*



1872-90

First, a summer in Iceland. Then Trieste. Professional exile. Wrote. Translated. Raged, and, finally, found time to sit still. *Ultima Thule*



The cowboy period, 1860 (AI restoration)

Almost everything Burton did resulted in a book. All upstairs in the Academy Burton Library. Pull one down!

THE ACADEMY BURTON LIBRARY

Second floor. Main building.



Burtoniana.org lists 60 books published by Burton, including posthumous ones. Collecting them all, especially in original editions, is a fascinating and potentially expensive hobby.



THE SCHOLAR OF SEX

While stationed in Trieste, writing at a rate that frightened his publisher,

Burton translated texts that Victorian England had never dared put into English.

He considered this as serious a scholarly project as any map he had ever drawn.

Burton in his study (AI restoration)

THE TRANSLATIONS

Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana (1883)

Co-translated with Arbuthnot. The first English translation of the Sanskrit text, though Burton couldn't read Sanskrit; he and Arbuthnot polished an earlier Indian scholar's version, and the famous name on the cover does quite a lot of marketing work.

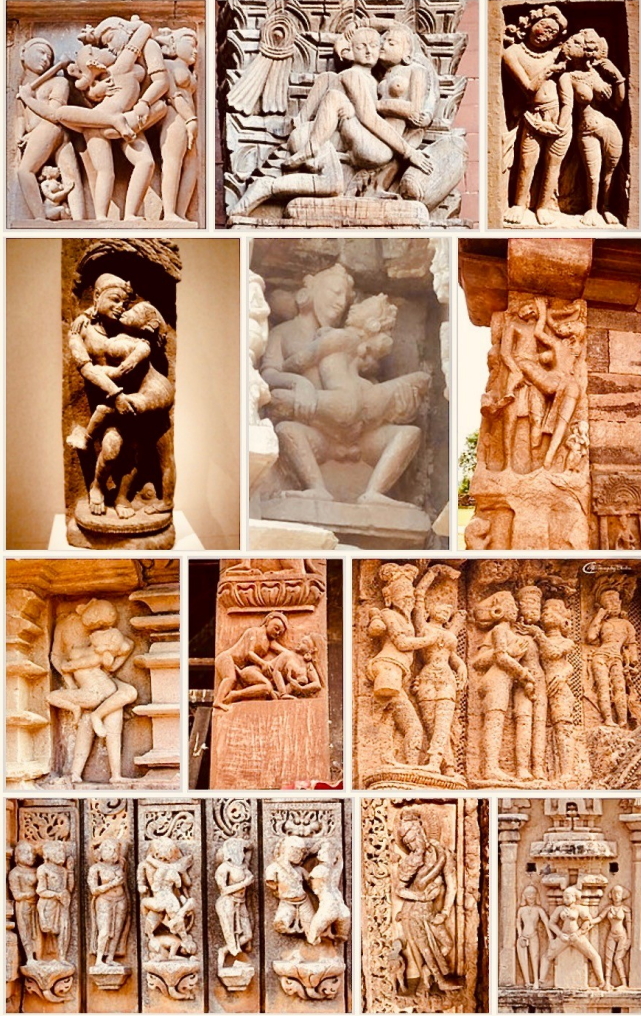
The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night (1885-88)

Ten volumes, completely unexpurgated, plus six of Supplemental Nights: sixteen in all. Sold so well by private subscription that it finally made him properly rich in his sixties.

The Perfumed Garden (1886)

Arabic erotic manual. Burton was working on a greatly expanded version, *The Scented Garden*, at the time of his death. Isabel burned it.

He published through the Kama Shastra Society, which he and his friend Arbuthnot invented for the purpose: a private club with exactly enough members to stay on the right side of the law. Barely.



Erotic temple carvings, India

A THOUSAND NIGHTS AND A NIGHT

16

volumes in all

10 + 6

the Nights, plus the
Supplemental Nights

£10,000

earned in one year (1887);
about £1.5m today

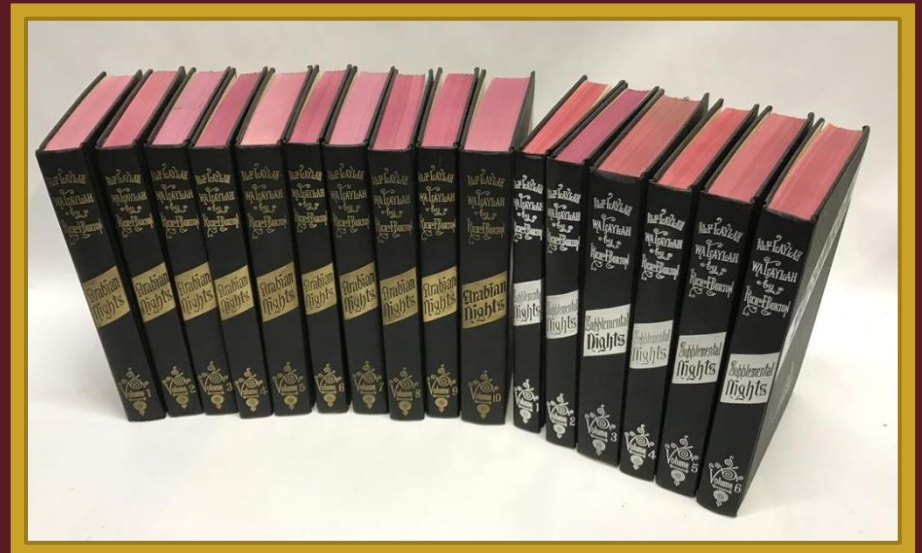
THE TERMINAL ESSAY

Buried in Volume X is a 50,000-word essay on what Burton called “The Sotadic Zone”: a geographical and anthropological survey of same-sex relationships across cultures and history, arguing they clustered in specific climatic bands rather than being confined to any one race.

At a time when the standard view was 'unnatural vice confined to degenerate races,' this was startlingly ahead of its time. It was quietly excised from later editions. Nobody in authority appeared to have read it.



Trieste, at work (AI restoration)



The complete set: Alf Laylah Wa Laylah by Richd. Burton on every spine

RACISM!

THE SAVAGES QUESTION

Burton on occasion called the people he encountered in Africa “savages” (as who wouldn't if one of them had thrown a spear through your face) and wrote about hierarchies of races with Black Africans somewhere near the bottom. This of course risks invalidating his entire career to the Moderns.

He also immersed himself in and documented their cultures with more care than almost any European of his era, he slept with dozens of their women, he opposed the slave trade, he occasionally used what power he had to defend the oppressed against their oppressors.

Both things are true. He was not a simple man.



Burton and a Somali girl (AI, derived from a real photograph of Burton alone)

DEATH & THE TOMB

Trieste, October 1890.

The evening before, he told Isabel: "Tomorrow I shall have finished this." The last page of The Scented Garden was on his desk. He died in the night, of a heart attack, at sixty-nine.

What happened next is the last and greatest scandal attached to his name. The truth of it is stranger than the legend.



The deathbed photographs, after Dr Baker's originals (AI restorations)

THE BURNING

Three years earlier, at Cannes, Isabel had baptised Burton herself while he lay unconscious after a heart attack; told of it that day, he was amused: “Now that was superfluous if only you knew.” He had already signed his consent to be received into the Church at his death. When the end came she sent for a priest, who hesitated over a man barely conscious, by some accounts already dead, then performed the last rites. It caused a lasting rift with several of Burton's friends.

Isabel burned it.

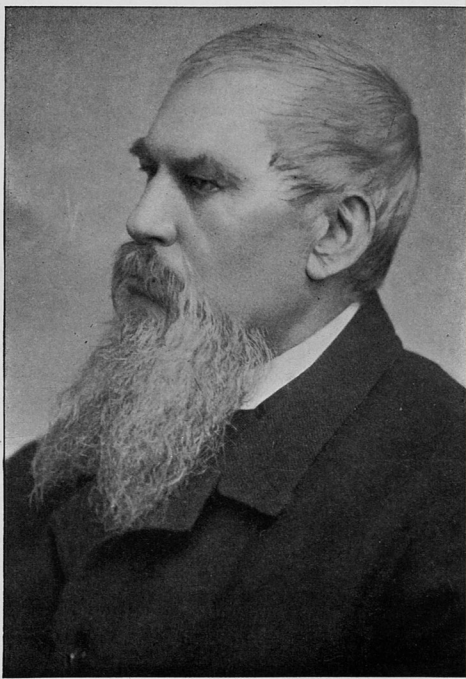
At his death he was working on an expanded *Scented Garden*, for which he had been offered six thousand guineas. Two weeks later she refused the money and burned both copies, sheet by sheet, at the fireplace in his room, copying his notes and the first and last line of every page as she went. His diaries were not in the fire: they survived her, and were burned only after her own death, on his standing instruction.



The legend, as the world told it (AI image)

*She said she did it to protect his reputation and his soul.
Scholars have been arguing about whether she was right ever since.*

THE MORTLAKE TOMB



CAPT. SIR RICHARD F. BURTON, K.C.M.G., F.R.G.S., ETC.
Ætat 69

Capt. Sir Richard F. Burton, Ætat 69

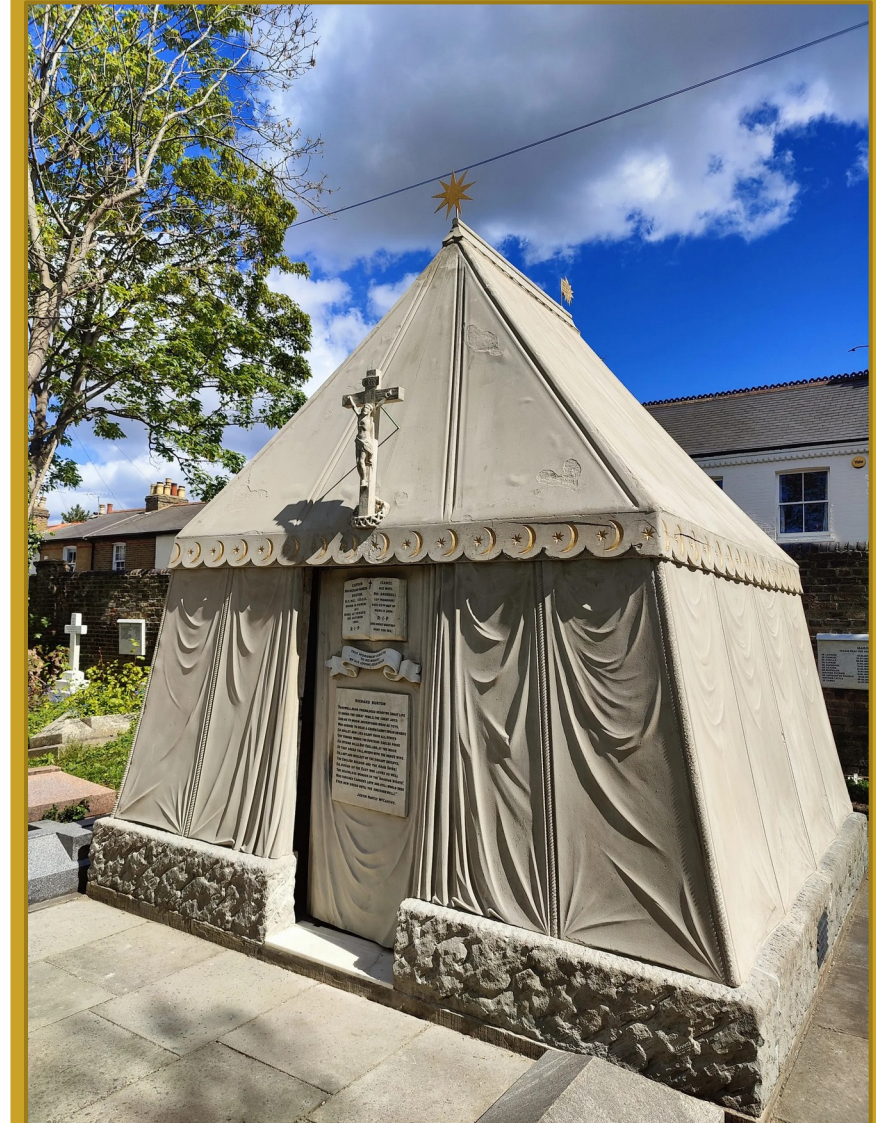
Isabel had Burton's body brought back to Mortlake and had a tomb built to her own design.

It is a stone tent: a full-scale Arab tent in Forest of Dean stone and white Carrara marble, in a corner of a Catholic churchyard, modelled on the tall tent Burton himself designed in Damascus so that he never had to stoop.

Look at what she put on it: a crucifix on the front face, and running along the eaves, a continuous band of Islamic crescents and stars.

She was a devout Catholic. He was an initiated Sufi. The tomb is both things at once: the only monument in England that is.

The strangest tomb in England. A monument that could only have been built by a woman who understood, completely, the man she was burying.



St Mary Magdalen, Mortlake, Surrey

INSIDE THE TENT



Interior: Burton and Isabel in their coffins, bells, painted angels, devotional objects, open through a grille at the back.



Front inscription: Burton's dates and Isabel's, with a poem by Justin Huntly McCarthy.

I've been there myself: climbed the ladder at the back, looked through the glass window. Genuinely one of the best things I've seen in England. Short train from Waterloo to Mortlake. It's worth the trip.



Richard F. Burton
الحاج عبدالله

With his pilgrim signature, al-Hajj Abdullah (AI restoration)

THE KASIDAH & SUFISM

In India, Burton had been initiated into a Sufi order, the Qadiriyya. He took this seriously, not as an anthropological exercise but as a genuine spiritual practice. He kept his Sufi name for the rest of his life.

In 1880, he published *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu El-Yezdi*, presented as his translation of a Persian Sufi poem. It was actually his own work, hiding behind an invented narrator to say things he couldn't say in his own voice in Victorian England.

The *Kasidah* is a long philosophical poem in the tradition of Omar Khayyam: sceptical, sensual, fatalistic, and deeply concerned with a question Burton never quite answered. What is the self, and what happens to it when it dissolves into something larger?

*“Do what thy manhood bids thee do, from none but self expect applause;
He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes and keeps his self-made laws.”*

*“All other Life is living Death, a world where none but Phantoms dwell,
A breath, a wind, a sound, a voice, a tinkling of the camel-bell.”*

WHY MEMORISE POETRY?

Let's go off on a tangent!

The value was never really about retrieval. It's about what carrying a poem in your actual memory, available without a screen, does to the rest of your mind.

It trains attention in a specific way: you cannot half-memorise iambic pentameter, the rhythm either holds or it doesn't, and getting it to hold is real, repeatable mental work: exactly the kind Burton used to learn twenty-nine languages, two months at a time.

It gives you, on demand, language for things you feel but don't have your own words for, which is most of what being young actually consists of.

And there's a simpler, more useful reason: a man who can stand up and recite something properly, from memory, with feeling, commands a room in a way that reading from a phone never will.

The discipline Burton used to dissolve himself into twenty-nine languages is the same discipline you use to carry twelve lines of Shakespeare in your head. It's attention. Hold that thought.

Stephen
Fry



The Ode Less
Travelled

UNLOCKING THE POET WITHIN

Write your own poetry!

If you want to write poetry yourself (and I think you should) get hold of Stephen Fry's *The Ode Less Travelled*.

It opens with a confession: "I have a dark and dreadful secret. I write poetry."

His point: Britain forgives any hobby except this one. And the impulse is in everyone, blocked by two false beliefs: that poetry is a technical academy for the initiated, or a formless free-for-all where anything goes.

The book is the apprenticeship every other craft already has: how to scan a line, what the metres and verse forms actually do, with exercises all the way (rhyme and the rest get their own chapters later). His first golden rule costs nothing: take your time. You cannot read a poem too slowly.

And I'll say this plainly: proper poetry rhymes.

Fry opens where every poet must: the organising principle of verse is the metre, not the sense, and the regularity is exactly what lets a variation carry meaning.

On the shelf in the Academy library. Take it.

I studied Fry's book for several days and I decided to have a go!

My poem: “Done with Keil Space”

What say you, asks Mohamed, of this work?
And I have to say I really cannot tell.
For mere months ago I gazed into the murk
And all that I could think of was the smell.
For Giulio the plumber with no brains
Had only gone and opened up the drains.
And there rose unwelcome up and out the pit
A stinking warm Vesuvius of shit.
The valiant perfume diffuser fought like mad
But its efforts only served to make it sad
For overwhelmed they were, its bergamot and musk
By the odour of Beelzebub's anus.
But what really, asks Mohamed, do you think.
For I really do not care about the stink?
Tis gone and hopefully for good
At least until the next unwanted flood.
So what say you, asks Mohamed, of Keil Space?
What is it your opinion of this place?
Well could it be I'm not the one to ask?
For witness I have borne to each small task.
While in Keil Space I look around and see
The leaks, the dust, the cracks, the lavatory..
Each rusty rail, each protruding nail, the lying network guy.
The workers who steal and never work, it's enough to make you cry.
And don't get me started, please, I beg,
On the stupid twat who sadly lives upstairs.
For I rue the day, I really do,
that he meddled in our affairs
“I'm going to stick your stupid bench
Right up your stupid arse.”
That's what I was forced to write to him
As if I had no class..
The Eyeties they have this effect on you
They make you really sad.
And so I'd rather set up a gallery
In Kabul or Baghdad.
Just fucking tell me, screams Mohamed, about Keil Space!
And as I gaze into his gentle bearded face
I say, well..

If it's good enough for the Emir of Qatar
Tis clear that you, my friend, and Sam shall go so far.
You will have earned and deserve a bucket load of cash
To spend on good rum, and sodomy, and the lash.
Will it send you mad and lead you down the drain
Into an ecstasy of speedboats and cocaine,
Two bellyfuls of good red wine and hock
And some young girl's mouth around your cock?
No, I think not..
For all who care to ask can understand
That Mohamed is a very nice young man.
A genius of marketing, a charmer and our chum.
He has contacts. He is street. He loves his mum.
The rain of hotel room keys he ignores
And the girls that threw them, yes of course..
For his inner mind is set on higher things..
The love of wisdom and all the good that brings
This work is to the glory of Allah
Subhanahu wa ta'ala
And Keil Space it is a Temple to the Lord
A portal to more dimensions long and broad.
Bohr, Bohm and Einstein, raised from the ground
Would doubtless find this place profound.
And were they to be returned from Hell
Michelangelo and da Vinci would as well..
So that'll do.
I thank you.

REMEMBER TO BREAK THE RULES OCCASIONALLY

The rule first: iambic pentameter is a pulse, te-TUM five times a line. The pulse has to be there before a break can mean anything, because a break in a pattern is a signal, and a break in noise is just more noise.

Shorten a line to make a silence: after eight lines of accelerating debauchery, the poem stops dead on four syllables. “No, I think not..”

Let the line overflow when the content does: the catalogue of Keil Space grievances bursts into fourteen-syllable lines, rail rhyming with nail in mid-flight.

Break the rhyme where the temper breaks: the stanza about the man upstairs abandons rhyme at the exact point where politeness was abandoned too.

And keep one perfectly regular line in reserve for the least poetic moment available: “And all that I could think of was the smell.”

“Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.”

attributed to Pablo Picasso, who almost certainly never said it; a misattributed rule about breaking rules seemed the right one to put here.

Full disclosure: I am not a master poet, and a good half of the breaks in my poem were accidents. Such craft as there is lay in noticing which accidents were better than what I had meant, and keeping them.

As in poetry, so in life..

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Act III, Scene 3

From Mohamed to Achilles.

Here's Ulysses (aka Odysseus), trying to talk a sulking hero back into the war by telling him the truth about glory: it doesn't wait for you.

The speech is sometimes called the finest argument against complacency in the English language. It was written around 1602. It has not aged.



Time hath, my lord,
a wallet at his back

Ulysses in Achilles' tent (AI scene, composed from separate Troy stills)

*"Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back, Wherein he puts alms
for oblivion..."*

Ulysses to Achilles

Mike Towler will now attempt to remember it for you.

HOW THE PROFESSIONALS ACTUALLY DO IT

Two researchers, Helga and Tony Noice, spent twenty years studying how actors hold thousands of lines. The answer: they don't memorise words at all. They memorise intentions, beat by beat, and the words attach themselves to the wants.

1 Meaning before memory.

Paraphrase every line into your own words, then ask what the speaker is doing with it: flattering, warning, needling? Chain the intentions and the words follow. Modern-English cribs help: No Fear Shakespeare (sparknotes.com) or Shakescleare (litcharts.com).

2 The verse is the scaffold.

Ten syllables, five beats: when you stumble, the meter tells you the shape of the missing word. Elizabethan actors held dozens of roles this way, from scrolls carrying only their own lines and a few cue words.

3 Test, don't reread.

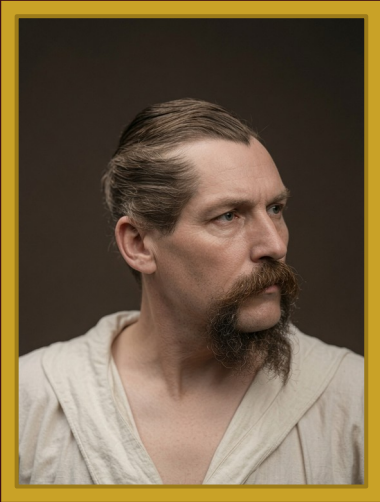
Retrieval beats rereading by a wide margin: cover the page and attempt it; the struggle is the point. Space the attempts over days, and sleep between them; memory consolidates overnight.

4 Learn it aloud, on your feet.

Spoken words stick better than read ones, and lines bound to movement stick hardest. Endgame trick: a card with just the first letter of every word, used until you can throw it away.

We have four complete Shakespeare works in the Academy Library. Take one. Act out scenes.

THE QUESTION THIS LECTURE WAS ACTUALLY ABOUT



Consider what Burton actually did, over and over again, his entire adult life:

He walked into a world that was not his own (a language, a culture, a religion, a body of knowledge) and he paid it total attention. Not the attention of a tourist, not the attention of a scholar at a safe distance.

He dissolved himself into it. He became, as far as a human being can, something other than what he started as.

Running underneath it all, a distinction:

THE NARROW BEAM

Attention that grasps: it names, files, and uses. It gives you the map.

THE OPEN FIELD

Attention that receives: it waits, joins, and is changed. It gives you the terrain.

A question to carry into the next four lectures:

What is actually happening when you pay that kind of attention?

Is it something your brain is doing? Is it something your brain is? Is it something beyond your brain entirely?

THE FENCER

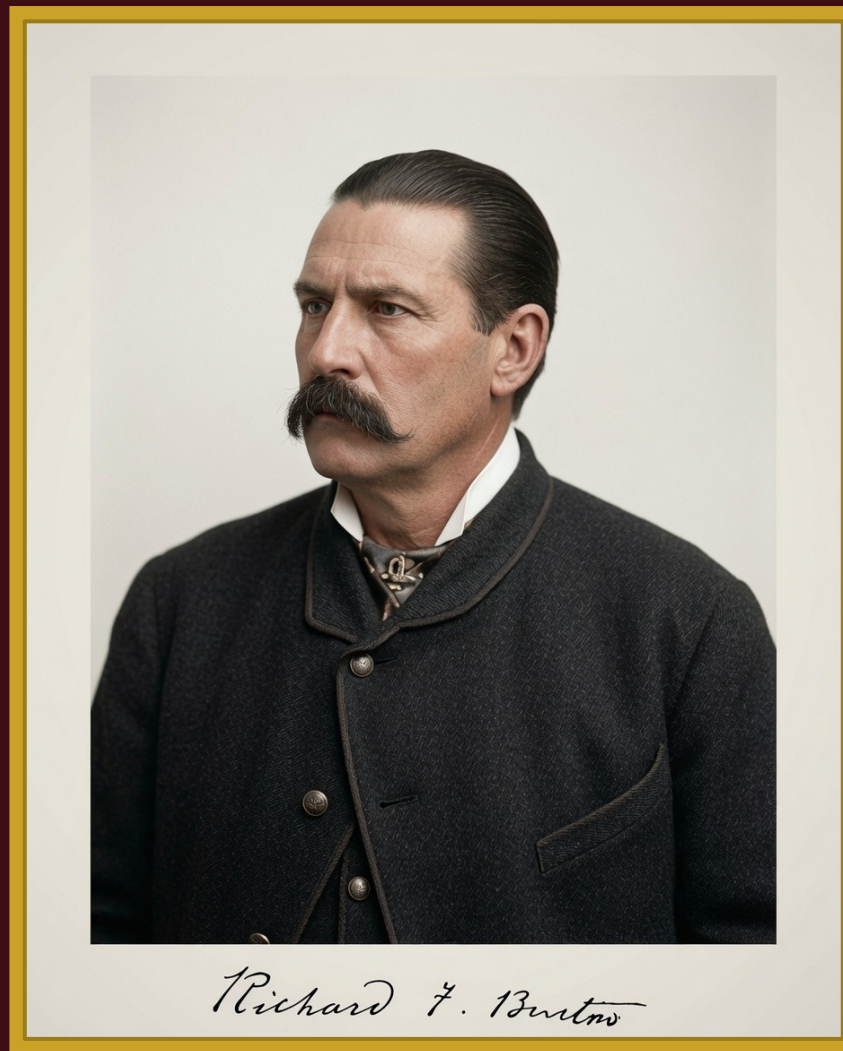


AI restoration

BURTON AND ISABEL



Isabel (AI restoration)



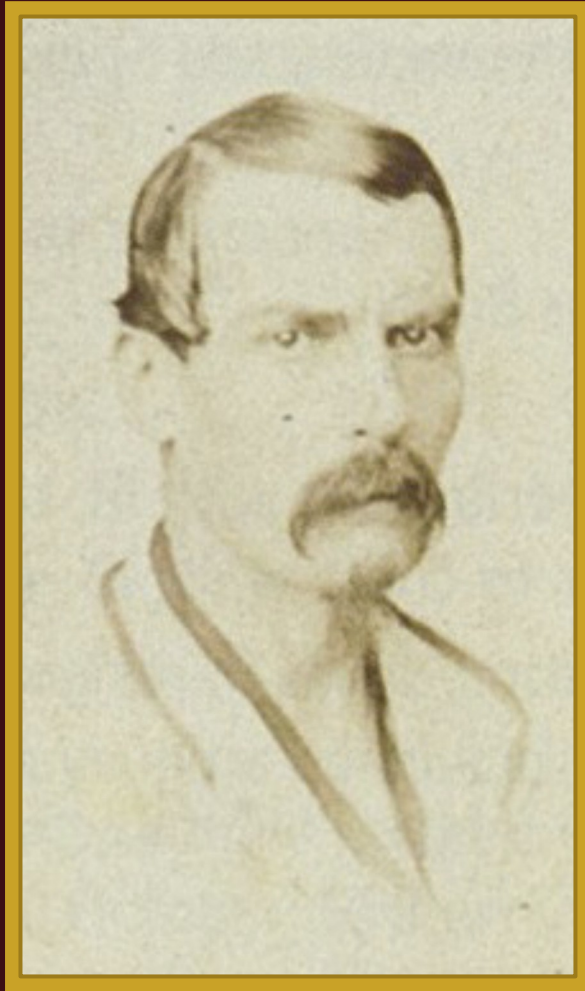
Richard (AI restoration)

THE OLD MAN

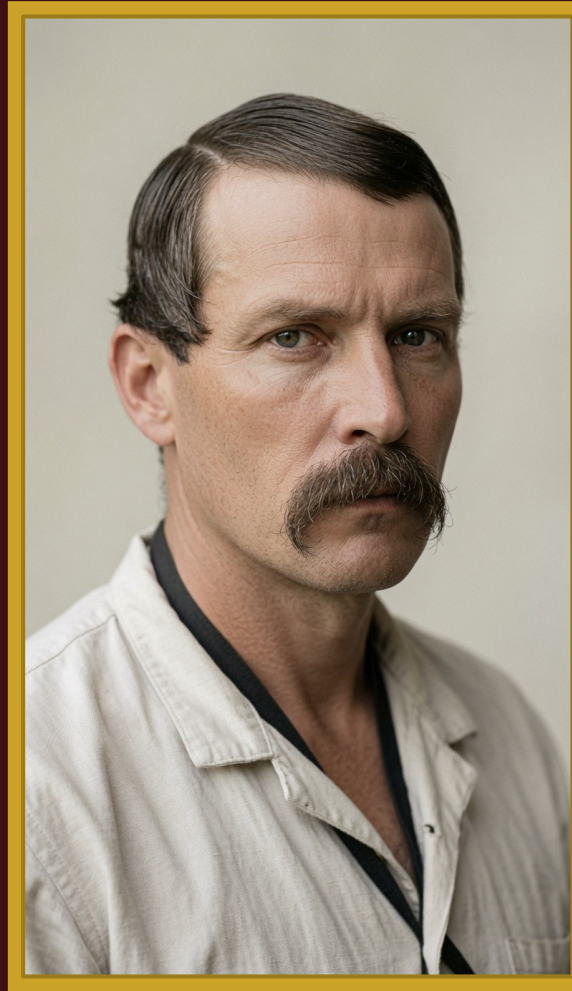


AI restoration

BEFORE AND AFTER AI



The original photograph



The AI restoration

The miracle of modern technology..