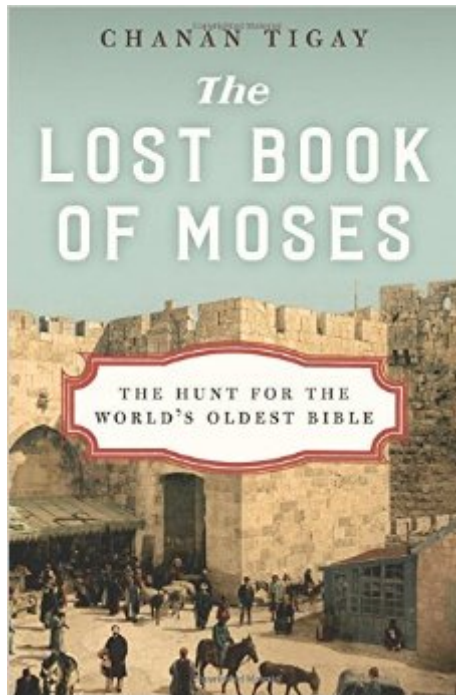


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The Lost Book Of Moses: The Hunt For The World's Oldest Bible



Synopsis

A gripping account of one man's quest to find the oldest Bible in the world and solve the riddle of the brilliant, doomed antiquities dealer accused of forging it. In the summer of 1883, Moses Wilhelm Shapira--archaeological treasure hunter, inveterate social climber, and denizen of Jerusalem's bustling marketplace--arrived unannounced in London claiming to have discovered the world's oldest Bible scroll. Written centuries earlier in the barren plains east of the Dead Sea and stashed away in caves, the mysterious scrolls called into question the divine authorship of the scriptures, taking three thousand years of religious faith and turning them upside down. When news of the discovery leaked to the excited English press, Shapira became a household name. But before the British Museum could acquire them, Shapira's nemesis, French archaeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau, denounced his find as a fraud. Humiliated, Shapira fled the country. Six months later he was dead. With the discovery of the eerily similar Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, investigators reopened the case, wondering whether the ill-fated merchant had, in fact, discovered the first Dead Sea Scroll, decades before the rest. But by then Shapira's scrolls had vanished. Tigay, award-winning journalist and son of a renowned Bible scholar, set out to find the scrolls and determine Shapira's guilt or innocence for himself. The globetrotting hunt that follows vibrates with the suspense of a classic detective tale. Weaving meticulous research into fast-paced storytelling, Tigay spins a remarkable tale of history and theology; intrigue and scandal; greed, ambition, and the struggle for authenticity. With a brilliant eye for detail, Tigay takes us from restricted storerooms at the Louvre to musty English attics to a flooded Jordanian gorge--and to the German countryside where he meets Shapira's aggrieved descendants. At once historical drama and modern-day mystery, *The Lost Book of Moses* brings to life 19th century London and Jerusalem and a cast of rogues, reverends, and relic hunters at whose center sits Moses Wilhelm Shapira, a flamboyant, ingenious, and ultimately tragic personality.

Book Information

Hardcover: 368 pages

Publisher: Ecco (April 12, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062206419

ISBN-13: 978-0062206411

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #241,329 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #306 inÂ Books > History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries #1456 inÂ Books > History > Ancient Civilizations #1508 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers

Customer Reviews

This is the first book in many years that motivated me to make a 24 hour delivery order, cancel appointments, and stay up until 2:30 in the morning reading. I was behind in my WSJ reading, and did not read the review there on Mr. Tigay's book until a few days ago (Isaac Chotiner, "Searchers Among the Scrolls," Saturday/Sunday, April 16-17, 2016, C6). Having a deep interest in biblical criticism, I snatched up and finished the book a few hours ago. For anyone interested in biblical criticism and theology, this is a must read. It will reward such interested persons intellectually, theologically, and emotionally. Mr. Tigay's book is almost a day-by-day account of his efforts to determine the location of Moses Wilhelm Shapira's lost Deuteronomy scrolls brought to light in 1883. We have a transcription and translation of those scrolls, but not the scrolls themselves, their last known location being in England in 1889. Along the way in his present-day search for the scrolls (leather rectangular fragments), Mr. Tigay tells us the story of the dangerous and exciting times that dominated the search for biblical antiquities in the late-nineteenth century, with Shapira being in the center of those storms. The book is extraordinarily well-documented. Mr. Tigay leaves us with every bit of documentary evidence possible in regard to his own search, so as to create an historical record that can be referred to in decades ahead. But in the process, the book was so deeply enjoyable to read. Mr. Tigay's self-deprecating humor and his sense of humor in general had me laughing out loud. For instance, he speaks of his search in terms of Indiana Jones and "The Da Vinci Code." But in all seriousness, Mr.

I agree with others that this is well written, readable in a day, and it achieves fairly successfully the intended narrative of a sort of personal quest of the author. But it isn't strongly informative on the hunted document text itself. Where in the book is the easily-obtainable (out of copyright) reproduction of some of the text?--and why not give a translation? Did Shapira's text have particular theological intentions? And the narrative, while skilled, maybe cheats a bit, overemphasizing the possible historical value of the text (did his scholar father suggest it might be genuine?--difficult to think, but unaddressed) and underemphasizing that it was already adequately shown to be a fake in the 19th century. For example, the first page of the book begins a "Dramatis Personae" including

"Mahmoud al Arakat: The sheikh in whose home Shapira first heard of the Deuteronomy scrolls." That's misleading, because it's from Shapira's claim or provenance cover story, which is false, but the author by this not-candid wording may not have wished to give it away on the first page. There still was value in trying to locate the forged scraps, and the Australian Matthew Hamilton, in this book and (I'm told) in the Sabo documentary ("Shapira and I"), is the star clue giver. The discussion on page 182 of the ink could have been clearer. We read that Shapira reported that he treated the scraps. "It was a risk. If the ink was composed of organic materials, the alcohol might easily degrade it, erasing forever the author's intent." Here, what is from Shapira and what is from Tigay is not clear. Had Shapira tested this before, so it might not in fact have been a risk? Are all "organic" inks so susceptible? Regardless of binder? What ink is used in traditional Torah scrolls?

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