



The Amber Room: The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasure

Catherine Scott-Clark , Adrian Levy

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One of mankind's greatest treasures, the Amber Room stood as a symbol of Russian glory for over two hundred years. But after the Nazi invasion, it was never seen again.

Now, in a masterpiece of detection, investigative journalists Catherine Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy have at last unraveled the jumble of evidence surrounding the Amber Room's fate. Journeying through the former Soviet bloc, and exploring archives in St. Petersburg and Berlin, they reveal what happened to the most valuable lost treasure in the world-and why the truth has been withheld for so long. Their revelations have broken a conspiracy of lies by the Russians who, for decades, have blamed the Amber Room's disappearance on the widespread looting of Nazi Germany, rather than face the shocking truth.

The Amber Room: The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasure Details

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Shannon says

This book is packed full of details - so many that it's tough to follow. Extended Russian surnames (and middle names) do not help. While assembling myriad details of the Amber Room mystery, it's necessary for the authors to include and follow through every lie, both intentional and not, fabricated story and piece of misinformation in the lexicon. It could, however, use a clearer sense of organization than the haphazard order in which they gleaned these details. Predictable Soviet and German bureaucracy frustrates the researchers/authors, while I would have preferred that frustration be limited in the re-telling. In parts, the story tries to take on a thriller-like true detective aspect, as the authors hide from Soviet intelligence services and are denied access to classified files, but that thread is lost constantly and lies dormant most of the book. It would better have served the story to simply compile a non-fiction book and leave the biography aspect out. Despite the pinballing narrative, I did learn a tremendous amount about the Amber Room, its history and the WWII setting in which it disappeared.

Meg says

The Amber Room has fascinated me since I first learned about it on a Discovery Channel show, it was something you never learn about here in the states. The show explored a few possibilities – but nothing near the research done in this book. Basically, the Russian curator of the Catherine Palace decided it was way too risky to evacuate the fragile Amber Room when the Germans were advancing on Tsarskoye Selo. The Amber Room's construction was very complicated – probably the largest and most fragile jigsaw puzzle ever. Unfortunately the Germans crated the Amber Room up and sent it off to German territory in Königsberg, after that the rest is a mystery. Did the Amber Room burn when the Russians were advancing on Königsberg? Were the Germans able to evacuate the Amber Room to East Prussia? Or has it been secreted away in bunkers under Königsberg all this time? Regardless of its fate, Russia continues to blame Germany for the loss of its greatest treasure.

Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy compiled their research journey into a narrative in this book – which at first was a style I absolutely hated. The first quarter of the book was boring – it seemed like a never ending pattern. They would meet with someone who could potentially give them information or access to archives, and almost always that person would say something along the lines of "you know how it works in Russia..." essential saying their palms needed to be greased. I was ready to toss this book into my never-finished pile indefinitely, but it finally started to pick up.

Even with the drudgery in the first section of the book, I still feel it deserves about 4.5 stars. While the narrative style was hard to get used to at first, it was definitely the best way to tell this story. All the different names and players were hard to keep track of after awhile, but then I remembered there's a who's-who guide at the beginning. I got excited with every strong lead – and was disappointed every time those leads were discredited or couldn't continue further. The authors definitely did their due diligence to research every possible angle, which really sold me on their conclusion. Anyone with a strong love for somewhat obscure history and the ability to read very long books about history will love this book.

K. says

I feel like the subtitle of this book is a little deceptive: "the untold story of the greatest hoax of the twentieth century"? Yeah, it's not a hoax so much as "no one really knows what happened and maybe one dude did and was too scared to say anything so he just swept it all under the rug and sat on his hands until he died because he didn't want to end up in the hands of the KGB or the Stasi". But, you know, whatever.

ANYWAY. This is a wonderfully researched and easy to read discussion of the Amber Room and what happened to it during the Second World War. It took me a while to get used to the writing simply because it's written in the first person plural - we checked into our hotel room, we were surprised to learn that..., we went to see our friend the professor - and the book doesn't really offer any definitive conclusions. But it's still a fascinating look at the utter madness that went on between Soviet Russia and Nazi/East Germany through until the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Tomi says

This book was a little hard to follow; the writing style was disjointed and jumpy. It followed the various attempts made by the Soviets and the East Germans to find the Amber Room. The authors presented a logical conclusion to the story, but recent discoveries (December of 2013) undermine that conclusion.

Valerie Kerwin says

You'd think a book that states they found the Amber room would actually give a concise answer to the question. Even an incomplete answer would have satisfied me. Plodding and filled with unresolved questions. Impossible to keep all the characters straight, and their minimal contributions. Not even an ending. Just stopped. I'd have been interested in an ending that included the reconstruction of the now copy in the palace.

Michael Gerald says

A look at one of the world's most intriguing mysteries, the authors used good research to show the history of the Amber Room: its history, descriptions of how it looked like, and the circumstances surrounding its capture by the Germans during the Second World War and its disappearance in the final months of the war in Europe. I find the authors' theory that the Soviets' negligence was one of the reasons why the treasure was captured by the Germans in the first place and why it was probably destroyed during the Soviets' recapture of Kaliningrad plausible.

Kaylie O'Neill says

Most likely one of my favorite books that I have ever read, "The Amber Room" was definitely a great and interesting read. This book discusses the mystery of the Amber Room- once considered the 'Eighth Wonder of the World'- which seemed to disappear without trace after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

The amber room was a room gifted to Russia, and was entirely made out of amber, which at the time of construction was worth more than gold. Due to issues involving the fragility of the room during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the room had to be left in the Catherine Palace. As a result, the walls were instead covered to imitate a plain room, but was still found and taken by the the invading forces. This book goes through hundreds of documents to try to piece together the location of the room, and also travels to various different places to discover the secrets of amber room.

One of the most interesting parts of the book in my opinion would have to be near the end. This book was able to really send you on real life plot twists, and by the end I wasn't even sure where I stood on where the location of the room could be, as all speculations I had on it seemed to fizzle out after the next chapter. The conclusion though was definitely one of the most surprising things however, and left me questioning even after I finished it.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in mysteries. Although most people I know prefer fictional ones, this one is still definitely for you, and I would read it if you could! I'd also recommend this to anyone who enjoys history and WWII, or Russian history. If you aren't interested in long reads, though, I wouldn't recommend it, but if you're up for a challenge, it's worth the purchase!

Courtney Smith Atkins says

This is a wonderfully researched book with lots of details about Russian bureaucracy. The Amber Room is a cultural beauty for the Russian people. The loss of this during WWII, created a treasure finding mission...for anyone interested! Let the lies and secrecy begin...

Realistically, the Amber Room was destroyed. The Amber Room has been re-created and is in it's home at the restored Catherine Palace.

Epic story line, the oral history is fascinating...but difficult to read in a book.

Nancy says

This is the non-fiction book I wanted to read before I read a work of fiction with the same title. There ought to be a law. Anyway...

The Amber Room has been called the Eighth Wonder of the World and was a room made all of amber, gracing the Catherine Palace in Russia. It was there for over 200 years until World War II and the Nazi invasion of Russia. Then the Amber Room was taken down, stored in crates and sent to what everyone believed was safety at Königsberg Castle. After that, the surrender of the Nazis and the end of the war, it was never seen again. People search for it to this day.

There are many theories about what happened to the Amber Room and some pieces of it have been found in the rubble at Königsberg. Some believe it to be hidden in mines in Germany or Austria while others believe it went down on a transport ship and still others think it was destroyed in the bombing of Königsberg. There is another theory that the Russians destroyed it to gain sympathy and reparations for losses during the war. This room has since been replicated at St. Petersburg.

The Amber Room by Catherine Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy is a highly readable and fast-paced book. It would be enjoyed by anyone who likes to explore mysteries of history.

R.E. Thomas says

In the early 18th Century, Prussian ruler Frederick I presented Tsar Peter the Great with a truly unique treasure: meticulously carved amber (then worth twelve times its weight in gold) that had been expertly assembled into enough wall panels to decorate an entire room. The beauty and value of the amber aside, as a work of craftsmanship the Amber Room was remarkable: imagine trying to repeat the same feat entirely from a single type of gemstone! The panels were assembled and re-assembled by the Romanovs, eventually finding a home in the Catherine Palace near St. Petersburg. There it remained until the Nazis stole it at the opening of the siege of Leningrad in 1941. The Nazis "returned" their ill-gotten prize to its city of origin, Königsberg (now the military enclave of Kaliningrad). It is from Königsberg where the Amber Room disappeared at the end of the war.

This is where authors Levy and Scott-Clark ("The Stone of Heaven") begin their book, exploring the efforts of various German and Russian parties to determine the fate of Russia's greatest lost treasure. Taking the reader through the spadework of securing and reviewing archival materials from former Soviet and East German archives, the result is a highly entertaining work of non-fiction that thoroughly illuminates both the mystery of the Amber Room and the issues involving works of art stolen by various parties during the Second World War. The missing amber panels became something of a Cold War propaganda football, being pushed back and forth between the Soviets and the West (West Germany in particular). The result is that "The Amber Room" reads very much like the kind of non-fiction thriller that would involve Cold War espionage, except that instead of military secrets or mole hunting, the book is about missing art. It is filled with tales of betrayal, intrigue, cynical careerism, and bureaucratic stalling that are often absurd, but always frustrating.

Like a real thriller, Levy and Scott-Clark include a real twist in theirs. As it follows the various investigations, the book seems to be leading towards a particular explanation, but ultimately the authors turn the story back on itself and return to the first theory regarding mysterious fate of the Amber Room. While their theory cannot be proven yet, their thought-process provides a certain dramatic edge to this work where espionage meets art history.

Cheryl says

During World War II, the Nazis implemented a plan to add all of Europe's priceless art treasures to a national museum in the Reich. The Amber Room in Russia was one of the targeted items. When Russian soldiers liberated Leningrad, the Amber Room was missing from the museum at the Hermitage. Co-authors Scott and Levy attempt to trace its whereabouts and this book details their efforts. Lots of twists and turns--reads like a spy novel!

Feisty Harriet says

I really wanted to love this, the concept is absolutely fascinating: a room paneled in amber from the Baltic Sea, installed in Catherine II's palace near St. Petersburg and generally referred to as the 8th Wonder of the World. During WWII when the Nazi's were marching towards St. Petersburg, museum curators and art historians frantically packed up as much as they could and sent priceless art by the train load to Siberia for

safe keeping. The Amber Room was left behind, museum curators could not figure out how to dismantle it in such a short time frame without destroying it completely. When the German army reached the city they looted and destroyed much of what remained. A few years later when the war was over and the staff returned the Amber Room was gone. This story follows the decades long search for the amber panels, in Cold War and Soviet Russia as well as in divided Germany. To date, the room has not been found (it was probably destroyed), but treasure hunters around the world continue to hunt for it. The story is SO interesting, but the authors really didn't focus on the interesting parts, instead, it seemed they focused on how difficult it was for them to get information. (Um, duh.) Skip this, watch Seasons 1 and 2 of White Collar instead.

Kasia says

I swallowed it in one go last Sunday. It's a great, quick and absolutely mesmerising read.

Cheryl says

When I started this book, I was hoping for a solid, well-written, well-researched account of what had happened to the Amber Room: the Nazi theft from Russia, its placement in Koingsburg, its disappearance in the last days of WWII, the search immediately afterward, the parallel searches by the Stasi and KGB during the Cold War, and what happened after the Cold War ended. What I got was, first and foremost, the authors giving a detailed, descriptive account of every who, what, when, where, why, and how in their search for information about the Amber Room and its fate. Second to that was, once in a while, the story of the Amber Room or an important event in the search for it (thank God, those parts were succinct and to-the-point).

The book dragged. I wanted to learn about the Amber Room, not read about. Every. Single. Interview and. Every. Single. Page. Of. Every. Single. Diary. And. Every. Single. Stasi. Report. And. Every. Sigh. And. Twitch. Of. Every. Person. They. Talked. To. Do we care about all the minutiae of the trip to the remote cottage of the former informant and the details of how his wife served tea and how he treated her, when none of it is relevant to your search for the Amber Room and all that takes five pages when you could have summed it up in about two and focused on what he had to tell you? No, we don't care about the irrelevant details. Get. To. The. Point. Tell us about the Amber Room: the Nazis taking it from Catherine Palace to Koingsburg, its mysterious disappearance from there, the searches for it immediately after WWII, the parallel searches by the Stasi and the KGB, and what's happened since the end of the Cold War. That is what I was hoping to read about, not how long you waited in Russia to talk to people and how hard it was to access archives and get the files you needed and how torn you were between staying in Berlin or returning to Russia and what was on each page of the nine files you read at the Stasi on 9 November 2004 (or whatever year you two were in Berlin). Get. To. The. Point. Summarize. You two *can* do that, yes? Good! DO IT.

If the authors want the reader to get a sense of the frustration they felt at how long their search for information was taking, at feeling like they were running in circles and getting nowhere and wondering when they were going to find some answers, then mission accomplished. If the authors want the reader to come away feeling at loose ends, mission absolutely accomplished, because after hanging in there for several hundred pages and forcing myself to keep going, certain there would be some kind of payout at the end, suddenly the end had arrived and the writers are escorting me, the reader, to the exit, and I'm mentally looking back over my shoulder as I try to dig in my heels and find out what the heck just happened because there's no way I could possibly be at the end yet; the exit wouldn't just pop up out of nowhere and the writers wouldn't leave everything wide open with no indication things were going to remain that way indefinitely if

it was the end. Right? Unfortunately, it is the end, that is the exit door, and I find myself feeling wishing I could have back the time I spent reading this book so I could invest it in one that focuses on the Amber Room. If I wanted to read about the deadly dull, excruciatingly slow research process, I'd get a book on how to research the provenance of artifacts, historical events, or some other such thing.

Scott says

The Amber Room was one of mankind's greatest treasures, a masterpiece of staggering ambition and value. Sent as a gift to Peter the Great of Russia, in 1717, The amber room was said to be the 'eighth wonder of the world'. And it vanished during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The book tells the story over a 60 years period of those who were determined to find it and restore it to its former glory. But I had challenges staying focused on the story. Some parts were extremely interesting and I could hardly put it down. Other parts, were best to just skim over. I can't say I would recommend it unless you are extremely interested in Russian art and modern day treasure hunting. And even if you are interested, there must be better books to read.
