

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

By Catherine Scott-Clark, Adrian Levy

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For more than two hundred years the Amber Room remained in its Russian palace outside St. Petersburg (Leningrad), but when the Nazi army invaded Russia and swept towards Leningrad in 1941, the panels were wrenched from the walls, packed into crates, and disappeared from view, never to be seen again.

Dozens of people have tried to trace the whereabouts of the Amber Room, and several of them have died in mysterious circumstances. Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark have gone further along the trail of this great lost treasure than anyone before them, and have unraveled the jumble of evidence surrounding its fate. Their search catapulted them across eastern Europe and into the menacing world of espionage and counterespionage that still surrounds Russia and the former Soviet bloc. In archives in St. Petersburg and Berlin, amid boxes of hitherto unseen diaries, letters, and classified reports, they have uncovered for the first time an astounding conspiracy to hide the truth.

In a gripping climax that is a triumph of detection and narrative journalism, *The Amber Room* shows incontrovertibly what really happened to the most valuable lost artwork in the world, and why the truth has been withheld for so long.

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

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From Publishers Weekly

In 1717, Prussian emperor Frederick I presented Peter the Great with a remarkable treasure: enough wall-sized panels covered with meticulously carved amber to decorate an entire room. Eventually installed in a palace near St. Petersburg, the Amber Room was stolen by the Nazis during the 1941 siege of Leningrad and hidden in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad)—after which little is certain. Levy and Scott-Clark (*The Stone of Heaven*) devote as much space to their efforts to sift through the sparse evidence as to their reconstructions, and though the story line is a bit muddled early on, when they also try to squeeze in the room's history, they eventually find a comfortable balance. Digging through files from former Soviet museums and the East German secret police, they retrace previous investigations and slowly realize just how valuable the missing room was to the Soviets as Cold War propaganda. Even after the collapse of communism, its potential recovery continues to stoke the flames of Russians' memories of the Great Patriotic War, and the probe raises important (though unfortunately unanswered) questions about the Red Army's activities as the war wound down in Europe. The pair of investigative journalists never quite manages to distract readers from the inevitable failure of their search, so the probable fate of the room, when finally broached, may strike some as anticlimactic. However, the authors do offer an intriguing peek at the inner workings of Soviet bloc espionage—along with a detour into the avariciousness of some contemporary Russians. 50 b&w images, 3 maps.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—This title might seem at first to be small-scale popular history, telling the tale of one of the more ornate artifacts of the 18th century. Yet the Amber Room is even more noteworthy for its historical importance. Originally designed for and begun by the Prussian royal family, it was still unfinished when they gave it to Peter the Great of Russia; it was completed and assembled in the lifetime of his successor, Catherine the Great. In 1941, the Germans overran the palace into which the room was fitted and it was moved to Königsberg, only to disappear as the Third Reich collapsed and the German city fell to the Red Army. The book details the hunt for the Amber Room, which has involved persons from Russia and both

Germany as well as one well-connected Russian émigré, a host of magazines, various spies, and occasional outbursts of popular enthusiasm. This alone makes for a gripping tale, but as the book progresses it becomes apparent that there is another level to this treasure hunt. The modern-day searchers, the authors and their allies, must deal with the agendas of previous hunters and of the guardians of the archives. Clear maps and average-quality photos are included. This engrossing book combines history, detection, and adventure.—*Ted Westervelt, Library of Congress, Washington, DC*

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From [Booklist](#)

Among myriad Nazi crimes, the looting of the art treasures of occupied countries was significant. Some of these treasures have been recovered and returned to national museums; some have found their way into private collections via shady brokers; some have never been recovered, and the most prominent of those is the Amber Room of Russia. Frederick I of Prussia gave these amber panels to Czar Peter the Great. They were apparently seized during the German siege of Leningrad in 1941, and for six decades their fate has remained a mystery. Levy and Scott-Clark are prizewinning investigative journalists who have used declassified files of the KGB and East German Stasi, recollections of insiders, and solid detective work to tell an exciting, intense, and surprising story. It is filled with episodes of cold-war intrigue, cynicism, amoral betrayal, and bureaucratic stalling that degenerates into absurdity. The assertions by Levy and Scott-Clark that they have solved the mystery cannot be verified yet, but they certainly provide us with a thrilling work.

Jay Freeman

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