



## **The Lost Book of Moses: The Hunt for the World's Oldest Bible**

*Chanán Tigay*

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One man's quest to find the oldest Bible scrolls in the world and uncover the story of the brilliant, doomed antiquarian accused of forging them.

In the summer of 1883, Moses Wilhelm Shapira—archaeological treasure hunter and inveterate social climber—showed up unannounced in London claiming to have discovered the oldest copy of the Bible in the world.

But before the museum could pony up his £1 million asking price for the scrolls—which discovery called into question the divine authorship of the scriptures—Shapira's nemesis, the French archaeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau, denounced the manuscripts, turning the public against him. Distraught over this humiliating public rebuke, Shapira fled to the Netherlands and committed suicide.

Then, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Noting the similarities between these and Shapira's scrolls, scholars made efforts to re-examine Shapira's case, but it was too late: the primary piece of evidence, the parchment scrolls themselves had mysteriously vanished.

Tigay, journalist and son of a renowned Biblical scholar, was galvanized by this peculiar story and this indecipherable man, and became determined to find the scrolls. He sets out on a quest that takes him to Australia, England, Holland, Germany where he meets Shapira's still aggrieved descendants and Jerusalem where Shapira is still referred to in the present tense as a "Naughty boy". He wades into museum storerooms, musty English attics, and even the Jordanian gorge where the scrolls were said to have been found all in a tireless effort to uncover the truth about the scrolls and about Shapira, himself.

At once historical drama and modern-day mystery, *The Lost Book of Moses* explores the nineteenth-century disappearance of Shapira's scrolls and Tigay's globetrotting hunt for the ancient manuscript. As it follows Tigay's trail to the truth, the book brings to light a flamboyant, romantic, devious, and ultimately tragic personality in a story that vibrates with the suspense of a classic detective tale.

## The Lost Book of Moses: The Hunt for the World's Oldest Bible Details

Date : Published April 12th 2016 by Ecco (first published February 9th 2016)

ISBN :

Author : Chanan Tigay

Format : Kindle Edition 371 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Religion, Audiobook, Archaeology



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Chanan Tigay**

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## From Reader Review The Lost Book of Moses: The Hunt for the World's Oldest Bible for online ebook

### **Jds says**

Chanan Tigay's engaging account of his international search for Moses Wilhelm Shapira's lost Deuteronomy scrolls created for me that most pleasurable reading dilemma. I was keen to discover what the outcome of his quest would be; but the reading experience was so enjoyable I didn't want it to end.

Any tale about antiquarian books and manuscripts interests me. But this one was especially satisfying. I enjoyed following Professor Tigay's research trail, his analysis and persistence. His Sydney visit in pursuit of a valuable clue was particularly interesting – and entertaining.

I liked the way Chanan Tigay told his story. With his kind of writing style, it does not surprise that he is an award-winner.

My only criticism, a minor one, is that the book lacked photos that, presumably, would be still available from some of the institutions involved. For example, motivated to read more, I obtained a copy of JM Allegro's *The Shapira Affair* (W.H. Allen, London, 1965) and was delighted to find eight pages of plates.

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### **Matt S says**

I found myself yelling several times "IT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM!" Definitely an adventure on par with Indiana Jones. There's action, drama, suspense, and a cast of characters similar to Indy, Belloq, Sallah, Brody and the gang you're accustomed to if you've watched those films. It brings modern archaeology to life and reinvigorates the feelings of interest in antiquities, how we can revive them over time, and if there is anything left to discover!

Definitely an excellent read, certainly a summer book. Tigay mentioned the Kol Nidre about halfway through the book, so I embraced the album "Jewish String Quartets" Compiled by Darius Milhaud as a listening companion on Spotify, and it did not disappoint on shuffle. Without a doubt one of the most exciting reads of the year.

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### **Katra says**

Oh, my, what a tale! Think Indiana Jones without the supernatural episodes.

In the 1880's, a man claimed to have obtained manuscripts from a Bedouin who found them in a cave near the Dead Sea. It contained a record of Deuteronomy vastly predating any existing biblical record - if it was authentic. Local scholars of the time dismissed it as a hoax. Then seventy years later after numerous, very genuine, scrolls were found under similar circumstances, niggling questions grew. Were they the real thing and where were they now? This chase to find the scrolls intertwines with the original story of their discovery kept me on the edge of my chair.

Highly recommended.

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### **Bucky Elliott says**

You'll probably love this book if you have at least an elementary interest in Ancient Near East antiquities and biblical textual criticism. If you're not mega-nerdy like that, you will still like it if you're into Indiana Jones and/or Dan Brown motifs. Especially since this is a true story from a journalist on an adventure to track down the origin and current resting place of a missing and controversial manuscript claimed to be the original autograph of Deuteronomy by Moses's own hand.

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### **Penny says**

If you are planning to read this book, be sure to put a post-it on the page immediately following the Table of Contents, which is basically a Table of Characters – because you will be trying to keep track of many different players representing factions from many countries on multiple continents. You might also wish to put a post-it on the section at the back called NOTES because they explain the source of quotes, facts, items, etc.

I knew Jerusalem (built in the fourth millennium BC) had been destroyed twice and besieged numerous times, but he enumerates: besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, captured and re-captured 44 times. And we know excavation is ongoing in many parts of the city. There is no telling what may yet be found.

I so wish the book had included photos – of Shapira, his wife, daughters, home, cemetery, the many places he describes in England (especially in northern England), the artifacts – existing scrolls, figurines, heads, pots, jars, urns, OTHER key players in England or Australia or California or the Netherlands or Jerusalem or Germany ... don't you just love it when you have a photo collection in the center of the book that you can refer to? [I did go to YouTube to listen to Kol Nidre referred to on page 163.] I know, I know ... he speaks of his meeting with Schwarz-Scheuls who said he could take a photo for himself but not for the book ... but that wouldn't rule out all the other photos!!

The author writes, "Shapira's story resonates tangibly more than a century after his untimely death. That is due in large part to the fact that the story touches on a need that is fundamentally human: to search for truth, to hunt for that which is authentic." I enjoy watching Mysteries at the Museum and a great many of the stories concern historical fraud or the suspicion of fraud, with the resulting answers to mysteries having been reached only during the recent past ... 30 years ago, 20 years ago, even only 10 years ago, using improvements that have been made in diagnostic tools and methods.

The author also writes, "What, then, to believe?" Even though he decides he absolutely knows what happened, I choose to withhold my agreement and to decide that even now we may not know. Some of the alternative theories he expounded might still be the "real" truth. Although he appears to find proof, it would not necessarily mean that his conclusions were correct. You may agree with him, but you won't know unless you read this book!

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### **Melora says**

Wavering between 3 and 4 stars. Rounding up to 4 because I suspect I'd have enjoyed it more if I'd read rather than listened – the author reads in my Audible recording and does an excellent job, but my listening/walking periods have been sporadic lately and I kept losing the train of the narrative. So, reader-fail. On the other hand, the story never became compelling enough that I was “drop-everything” eager to get to it, so maybe it wasn't *just* me.

Anyway, this is a story-within-a-story, and, while not exactly *thrilling* (I notice that some reviewers felt that it was “Indiana Jones-like.” My memories of Indiana Jones may be off, but I recall lots danger and action, rather than extensive library research and meetings. Still, there *is* a search for an Ark of the Covenant era artifact, and lots of antisemitism, if no Nazis, so...) it is interesting. Except when it gets repetitive. The story is about the hunt by our author, Chanan Tigay, for the leather strips, lost at the end of the 19th century, purported by their “discoverer”, Moses Shapira, to be the oldest copy of Deuteronomy. Along with the tale of his search, he tells Moses Shapira's story, debating the question of whether Shapira was the brilliant creator of a clever hoax, the persecuted victim of antisemitic prejudice, or the maligned discoverer of an ancient treasure. Or a bit of all of these. An intrinsic problem for Tigay's story is that we, his readers, would have *noticed* if news headlines had recently gone wild with the story of the discovery of a genuinely ancient copy of the Book of Deuteronomy and of a maligned antiques dealer. So we know right up front that Tigay *isn't* going to find the strips, have them analyzed using modern dating methods, and discover that they really *are* what Shapira suggested they were. So, our options are more limited and with less potential for thrills. Still, given this, Tigay does manage to maintain some suspense and to create a reasonably satisfying conclusion. The ins and outs of Tigay's hunt and of Shapira's intrepid efforts are fairly engaging despite the predictable outcome.

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### **Gina says**

An engrossing adventure and mystery. Tigay is a great storyteller and weaves a tale about the quest for the world's oldest bible. The book provides a history of the Bible and related relics and also a breakdown of the mystery surrounding the questionable provenance, possible forgery, and disappearance of the purported oldest version of Deuteronomy. The book is a blend of history, archaeology, religion, and biography. Fans of historical writers like Larson and Dash will enjoy this book. The book can also be enjoyed by the religious and non-religious alike for the history and archaeology.

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### **Cheri says**

I read this book because I had seen a display of Shapira's collection in the rare book room at UCSF (and with the info I got there, the ending was no surprise). The book is really two stories: the author's search to find the Deuteronomy strips and the story of Shapira himself. Woven in with all of this was fascinating info on how authenticity is established. I enjoyed parts of the book very much, but I found the way it jumped around to be sometimes annoying and occasionally confusing. It also seems that by telling the story as part of the author's own discovery, the earlier portions talking about Shapira and other dealers in ancient manuscripts needed to be reexamined in the light of what the author eventually learned. Tigay tacks on a bit of that at the end, but I think it should have been more integral to the story.

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### **Marv says**

A excellent read. Very well researched and written.

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### **Heather Williard says**

\* from an Advanced Readers Copy

A smart, well-researched and deeply entertaining book about the oldest Bible in the world and the mysterious antiquities dealer who claimed to have several of the scrolls. Part biography, part modern-day treasure hunt, Tigay takes us on a fast-paced and fascinating journey across Europe, Australia and the Middle East. Highly recommended -- I couldn't put it down.

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### **Carlos says**

Highly interesting topic. If you are into ancient parchments, biblical history and want to learn more about early archaeology then this is the book for you. You'll learn about the rush for ancient biblical archeological proof in the Late Ottoman Empire and later on the Jewish State. If you are into history and archaeology this is the book for you.

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### **Jenny Kim says**

\*Based on a reading of an ARC

It's been a while since I last read a history book, so long ago that I don't recall the last one. This book made me realize why I prefer reading fiction over non-fiction. I find that with fiction, I don't need to give full attention to every single sentence but that is not the case with non-fiction, which requires a bit more effort and 100% attention. Keep those in mind when reading this review.

This book is a biography and investigation into Moses W. Shapira. But whether intended by the author or not, it's also about glimpse into the time in history in which someone like Shapira could thrive; the greed and competition by European countries to own biblical artifacts and greed for recognition and wealth that motivated man like Shapira to provide them what they wanted.

Born out of curiosity that started from a dinner conversation, the author dedicates four years of his life globe-trotting, looking through library materials, doing interviews and internet searches. This book deals with interesting subject, but it is dry. I learned about Shapira, the main person of importance, the one who found the Moabite Scroll of Deuteronomy, that could be either fake or genuine, and the author's search for the missing scroll.

At just 250+ pages, I thought this was a nice book to deep my toe back into history world. But I did think that this book lacked something, which as of now, I am going to gently suggest is depth and I felt some of the pages at the end was unnecessary and felt like blabber.

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### **Bharath says**

This is as close as it can get to a real life "Da Vinci Code" style thriller. The narrative style of Chanan Tigay keeps the reader engaged throughout. It's a page turner in the true sense of the word. In equal measure entertaining and enlightening regarding Judaism/Christianity.

Apart from the narrative style, what I admired in his writing was the nuanced character portrayal of a flawed and often controversial figure in biblical archaeology. Fleshing out a living and breathing character out of fragments of news articles, auction catalogues, references in fictional works and more often through a biased portrayal in news/memoirs is nothing short of a monumental challenge. The author does all this and gives an insight into the tough and demanding world of journalistic research. Reminded me of a modern day Indiana Jones, only whose journey is through cities across the globe and museums rather than through fantastical ruins or dense jungles. The author also does a great job of portraying this against the backdrop of the colonial powers' tussle for control on their subject countries - Control over both their natural and historical possessions.

Would highly recommend this to anyone with even a passing interest in history/religion.

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### **Inken says**

The story of a self-confessed obsessive, Tigay details the four years he spent trying to track down the fragments of a manuscript/scroll purported to be an original book of Deuteronomy.

In 1883 Moses Shapira, a Jerusalem-based antiquities dealer, presented to several renowned scholars and archaeologists fragments of what he claimed was an original Deuteronomy manuscript. These (white, male Victorian) scholars dismissed the items as forgeries, resulting in Shapira's humiliation and ruin. Several months later, he died in a squalid Rotterdam hotel and was buried in an unmarked grave. In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd found the Dead Sea Scrolls in a damp, unused cave and contemporary scholars began wondering if Shapira's find had, in fact, been genuine all along. Growing up with tales of Shapira, journalist Tigay became obsessed with finding the remnants of Shapira's scrolls. This book details both Tigay's relentless hunt across continents (travelling to Australia, England and Israel amongst others), as well as the history of Shapira's life, the difficulties of archaeology in the Middle East, the ambition, rivalries, greed and nefariousness of just about all the characters involved.

Tigay admits throughout the book that Shapira could well have been guilty of forgery, altho one gets the definite impression he secretly hoped the fragments had been genuine, thereby rescuing Shapira's reputation. Tigay clearly feels some sympathy for him, as well as the dealer's widow and daughters who, faced with poverty and debts, emigrated from Israel to live out their days with relatives in Germany. Tigay also describes Shapira's rival and nemesis, a less-than scrupulous archaeologist Ganneau, who committed several acts of professional impropriety before destroying Shapira's life.

Tigay's book is a great tale of obsession, research, archaeology and prejudice, but it does drag in places and there is a lot of repetition. Tigay does a good job of putting Shapira's life and circumstances in context but it's sometimes hard to stay on top of all the people involved in the tale, both Victorian and contemporary. There were several times I was sorely tempted to skip ahead just to get to the point of the chapter! I'm also not entirely sure I agree with Tigay's conclusions and the ending seems awfully abrupt compared to the rest of the book, as if Tigay just threw up his hands in exhaustion and quit when presented with what he thought was the answer.

Shapira was a self-made man, growing up in a Polish shtetl before converting to Christianity, marrying a devout protestant and moving to Jerusalem, but he was always an outsider in whatever world he inhabited. Definitely flawed, Shapira was also a loving husband and father, courageous and a risk-taker. Was the scroll no more than an audacious gamble by a man trying to raise himself out of the ranks of being a shop-owner to the heights of archaeological fame or did Shapira own something that could have changed Biblical history and studies forever?

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### **Nina says**

Amazing efforts at historical research that involved flying all over the world, going through obscure papers, digging deep into storage vaults in old buildings, taking advantage of serendipitous encounters with an interesting array of people, and just dogged research over several years. The author wanted to settle the issue of whether a book of Deuteronomy, supposedly the oldest ever found, was genuine or a forgery. The scroll fragments were lost, so he had his work cut out for him. Ultimately he established that they were indeed extremely clever forgeries, just as had been determined in the last 19th century when they came to light.

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