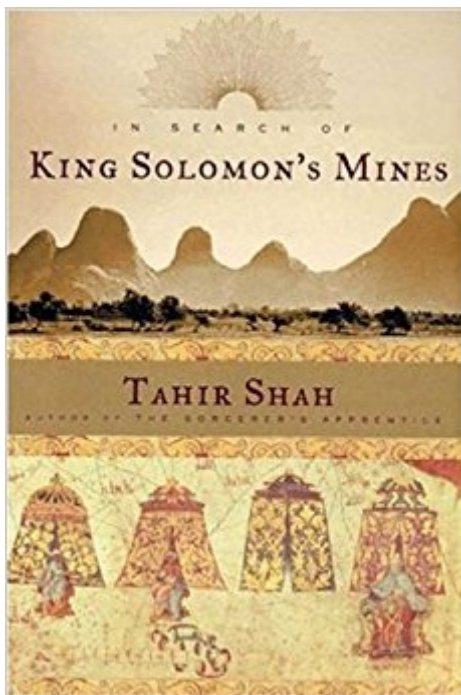


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In Search Of King Solomon's Mines



Synopsis

King Solomon, the Bible's wisest king, also possessed extraordinary wealth. He built a temple at Jerusalem that was said to be more fabulous than any other landmark in the ancient world, heavily adorned with gold from Ophir. The precise location of this legendary land has been one of history's great unsolved mysteries. Long before Rider Haggard's classic adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines* produced a fresh outbreak of gold fever, explorers, scientists and theologians had scoured the world for the source of the king's astonishing wealth. Tahir Shah takes up the quest, using as his leads a mixture of texts including the Septuagint, the earliest form of the Bible, as well as geological, geographical and folkloric sources. Time and again the evidence points towards Ethiopia, the ancient kingdom in the horn of Africa whose imperial family claims descent from Menelik, the son born to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Tahir Shah's trail takes him to a remote cliff-face monastery where the monks pull visitors up on a leather rope, to the ruined castles of Gondar, and to the churches of Lalibela, hewn from solid rock. In the south, he discovers an enormous illegal gold mine where thousands of men, women and children dig with their hands. But the hardest leg of the journey is to the accursed mountain of Tullu Wallel, where legend says there lies an ancient shaft, once the entrance of King Solomon's mines.

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Customer Reviews

Travel writer Shah (*Sorcerer's Apprentice*; *Trail of Feathers*) paid 600 shekels in a Jerusalem souk for a dubious map of the route to King Solomon's mines; he admits, "I have an insatiable appetite for questionable souvenirs." The London-based writer is also fond of danger: "As soon as there's a

bomb, an earthquake, a tidal wave or a riot, I call the travel agent and book cut-price seats." But the ultimate thrill is a challenging mission, and this time, it's finding the biblical land of Ophir, legendary source of the gold for King Solomon's Temple and perhaps of the Queen of Sheba's riches as well. History and geography point to Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa, Shah hires a vocally Christian taxi driver who becomes his guide, and the two set out on the quest. They wander rural Ethiopia, sleeping in brothels, slipping into illegal mines, walking through deserts in camel-led caravans and finally, riding mules to the alleged source of Solomon's gold. Along the way, Shah learns loads of useful things: prostitutes require customers to wash themselves with Coca Cola to avoid AIDS; the hyena-man of Harar feeds the hyenas nightly to keep them from carrying off the village children; gold miners fear disembowelment by thieves trying to extract the nuggets they've swallowed on the job. Does Shah get the gold in the end? Well... he's more Don Quixote than Indiana Jones. Shah is so entertaining, most readers won't realize that while walking on the wild side, they've also just done a quick course in Ethiopian history. 16 pages of b&w photos, one map. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Adult/High School-Studying an old map he purchased in the Jerusalem bazaar that supposedly showed the location of King Solomon's mines ignited in Shah a dormant interest in actually finding them. Arriving in Ethiopia, he hired a taxi driver who rapidly became interpreter, guide, historian, companion, Christian missionary, and more. They visited legal and illegal gold mines, explored ancient sites, and identified and visited areas important to their goal. They experienced total immersion in the cultures of Ethiopia. Transportation became the biggest challenge whether in the form of buses, vans, on foot, or by mule, for roads were often little more than beaten-earth pathways filled with rocks, holes, and other hazards. Tired of various modes of travel, they hired a car, whose driver chewed qat, a mildly addictive and narcotic leaf that manifested itself in the form of erratic driving, and resulted in an impressive amount of roadkill. Snatches of humor helped to alleviate the constant scenario of poverty just as the generosity of the Ethiopians soothed some of the rigors of the trip. Students interested in adventure, history, African culture, or biblical history will find themselves caught up in the book's excitement and drama. Pam Johnson, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Riveting, hard to put down. I haven't finished it yet, but even if it turns out his quest is ultimately unsuccessful, the narrative is highly entertaining. I cannot grasp how he survived the conditions and situations he encountered; he must be one of those who thrive on danger and uncertainty. I keep

wondering how he always has come up with enough money to buy supplies and press for information. Pictures of the people and places he writes about are included. His descriptions of parts of Ethiopia arouse a desire to see it for myself -- but not all of it! It's obvious he survived, though I haven't got to the end and learned if he wound up with all his body parts.

I do not feel I wasted my time reading this. It is what is left out that concerns me: place the author in time context; explain how one plans for such a great undertaking; explain how an adventurer seems to have an unlimited supply of money while gas, food, etc. can be in dangerously short supply. Does the author go on these trips in order to write about them and make money or does he already have wealth and the books are a way of sharing his adventures? I am not saying that these details need a chapter, but some could be in a Preface by the author and others could be worked into the plot as they fit--such as the money. The author is very well read about other adventurer's wanderings--both ancient and current. He certainly convinced me that he knew what he was talking about. Also, his portraits of people was insightful. While the end of his trip was abrupt, I didn't think it was necessary to end the book abruptly. If you really like adventure you might very well give this 5 stars.

Tahir Shah's generous genius for extreme travel on the brink of suicidal folly reaches the breadth and depth of an open-pit mine in his recent adventure. Look closer, and detect another kind of gold: a layer of wisdom interwoven in the tale, like nuggets in tunnels along a gold seam, or lying close to the surface of the red clay of Ophir, the legendary land of Sheba. Dig King Solomon's Mines, and plumb the tragi-comic depths of the human condition.

As someone who has travelled the continent and lived in it for more than a decade, this is the book for all those who still maintain a romantic vision of modern times in Africa. And for the so-called African experts (some of which have never actually traveled outside of multi-star hotels and government sponsored trips into the 'bush') I strongly suggest that they spend some time getting to know the real Africa. Well done Mr. Shah and I look forward to your next great adventure into the daily, and sometimes miserable, lives of average people who aren't motivated by political gain but are just trying to get by. I would caution those pundits of Africa's present day ills, however, that this real life story will not conform to the text book learning and rhetoric used so often to describe a wonderful continent's self-generating decline.

Enchanting...It works as a mystery story and a travel story, to the regions of Africa I'd never

been...And it does not disappoint.

very believable account

This whole thing starts to wonder about 1/2 way thru and sadly I put it down and heavysset to pick it up.

Tahir Shah's book *In Search of King Solomon's Mines* is a fascinating and eye-opening account of a journey through Ethiopia at the start of the twenty-first century, by one of the great travelers of the contemporary world. From finding a treasure-map in the old quarter of Jerusalem to the dreadful scouring of Tullu Wallel, the Devil's mountain in western Ethiopia, Shah keeps up a cracking pace, interspersing his near-catastrophic adventures with the history of the country and details of other explorers' journeys. Among many highlights are the description of the dreadful conditions in one of Ethiopia's illegal gold mines; the hyena-feeder of Harar; the ascent to the monastery on the top of the sheer-sided mountain Debra Damo; the fortitude of the expedition's Jeep (which used to belong to Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia); and a wonderful cup of coffee that it takes Shah's hosts several hours to brew. The grandeur and harshness of the land and also the fortitude of the Ethiopian people are vividly evoked. I highly recommend this. An invitation to adventure, it also works as a tonic for the jaded.

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