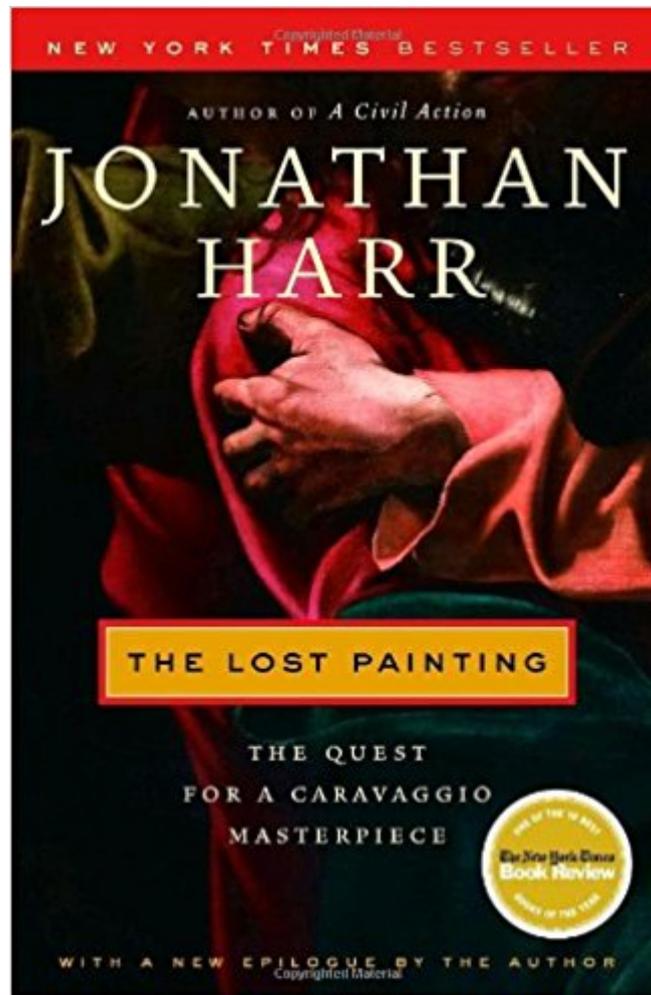


The book was found

The Lost Painting



Synopsis

An Italian village on a hilltop near the Adriatic coast, a decaying palazzo facing the sea, and in the basement, cobwebbed and dusty, lit by a single bulb, an archive unknown to scholars. Here, a young graduate student from Rome, Francesca Cappelletti, makes a discovery that inspires a search for a work of art of incalculable value, a painting lost for almost two centuries. The artist was Caravaggio, a master of the Italian Baroque. He was a genius, a revolutionary painter, and a man beset by personal demons. Four hundred years ago, he drank and brawled in the taverns and streets of Rome, moving from one rooming house to another, constantly in and out of jail, all the while painting works of transcendent emotional and visual power. He rose from obscurity to fame and wealth, but success didn't alter his violent temperament. His rage finally led him to commit murder, forcing him to flee Rome a hunted man. He died young, alone, and under strange circumstances. Caravaggio scholars estimate that between sixty and eighty of his works are in existence today. Many others "no one knows the precise number" have been lost to time. Somewhere, surely, a masterpiece lies forgotten in a storeroom, or in a small parish church, or hanging above a fireplace, mistaken for a mere copy. Prizewinning author Jonathan Harr embarks on an spellbinding journey to discover the long-lost painting known as *The Taking of Christ* "its mysterious fate and the circumstances of its disappearance have captivated Caravaggio devotees for years. After Francesca Cappelletti stumbles across a clue in that dusty archive, she tracks the painting across a continent and hundreds of years of history. But it is not until she meets Sergio Benedetti, an art restorer working in Ireland, that she finally manages to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle. Told with consummate skill by the writer of the bestselling, award-winning *A Civil Action*, *The Lost Painting* is a remarkable synthesis of history and detective story. The fascinating details of Caravaggio's strange, turbulent career and the astonishing beauty of his work come to life in these pages. Harr's account is not unlike a Caravaggio painting: vivid, deftly wrought, and enthralling." . . . Jonathan Harr has gone to the trouble of writing what will probably be a bestseller . . . rich and wonderful. . . in truth, the book reads better than a thriller because, unlike a lot of best-selling nonfiction authors who write in a more or less novelistic vein (Harr's previous book, *A Civil Action*, was made into a John Travolta movie), Harr doesn't plump up his tale. He almost never foreshadows, doesn't implausibly reconstruct entire conversations and rarely throws in litanies of clearly conjectured or imagined details just for color's sake. . . if you're a sucker for Rome, and for dusk. . . [you'll] enjoy Harr's more clearly reported details about life in the city, as when--one of my favorite moments in the whole book--Francesca and another young colleague try to calm their nerves before a crucial meeting with a forbidding professor by eating gelato. And who wouldn't in

Italy? The pleasures of travelogue here are incidental but not inconsiderable." --The New York Times Book Review"Jonathan Harr has taken the story of the lost painting, and woven from it a deeply moving narrative about history, art and taste--and about the greed, envy, covetousness and professional jealousy of people who fall prey to obsession. It is as perfect a work of narrative nonfiction as you could ever hope to read." --The EconomistFrom the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Not having read Jonathan Harr's previous book, ("A Civil Action") I'm unable to comment on which is the better book; what I can say, though, was that I was totally captivated by "The Lost Painting." Many scholars acknowledge that there probably are several missing Caravaggio masterpieces lying about forgotten and neglected. "The Lost Painting" is about the search for and discover of one such painting, "The Taking Of Christ." In 1989, while working on a project, graduate students, Francesca Cappelletti and Laura Testa, come across mention of the sale of "The Taking of Christ" in the early part of the nineteenth century by the then owner, Guiseppe Mattei to a Scotsman. The information fires up in Francesca a desire to discover what happened to the painting from this point on. She is only partially successful. In the meantime, art restorer, Sergio Benedetti, makes an astonishing discovery when a routine job nets an unexpected find...Jonathan Harr did, I thought, a wonderful job of vividly conveying the excitement and drive of those involved in the search for (Francesca Cappelletti) and discovery of Caravaggio's lost painting (Sergio Benedetti). And if the author sometimes sounded a little detached and removed from what he was relating in the book, he more than made up for it with his clear and precise descriptions of scenes and

characters -- I thought that his portrayal of the slightly gaga Marchesa was priceless; and really enjoyed his brief but telling descriptions of all the characters, both primary and secondary. My sole reservation lay in what I thought was the unnecessary inclusion of Francesca's private romantic life into the book. It struck a slightly jarring note, I thought. Fortunately, this was far and few between. I was also disappointed that neither the author nor his editors thought to include picture plates of some of the paintings discussed in the book. It would have been nice to have had easy access to the Doria Pamphili "St. John," the Capitoline "St. John" and esp "The Taking of Christ" without having to unearth my old art history books, still in boxes. Oh well, at least it inspired me to put up more bookshelves and unpack all those boxes of books! All in all, though, "The Lost Painting" was a completely riveting and enthralling read, and one I would especially recommend to art lovers everywhere.

I couldn't put this book down! As usual, the truth reads better than fiction. Over the years, many people representing many different interests searched for the whereabouts of a missing masterpiece by the great Caravaggio. All met with dead ends. In this fast paced book, the author introduces us to those in the art world who were involved in the search, and he allows us to see how each contributes to the final outcome. We are there as each new clue is discovered. Caravaggio was evidently a pretty wild character who was no stranger to the police. How such a man was able to create paintings of such light and beauty is incredible. Learning more about the artist is one of the highlights of the book. I don't want to spoil the story by giving away any details. Reading first-hand how things slowly evolve is part of the fun. I do highly recommend it, though, to anyone interested in Italian art, in art history, or to anyone looking for a good, intelligent mystery. A fascinating story.

I really love history, and especially art history. A book about the finding of the long lost Caravaggio painting "The Taking of Christ" got me really excited. Then I started reading it. Evidently authors like Mr. Harr feel that most people won't pick up a book that is not fiction so he writes in a way that gives new meaning to the term "narrative history". At first he seems to want to write a novel. We go riding through the mountains seeing the scenery, experiencing the ocean breeze, pulling over to the side to let faster vehicles pass us by. Our brakes aren't too good, but now the road gets wider....etc. I am getting very impatient with this book about this time. This is novelistic fill that I am reading. But then half way through the book a new day dawns. We no longer have to sit through a dinner where an art historian has ordered "an antipasto of mixed seafood marinated in olive oil and lemon juice followed by medallion of veal with lemon and capers and a plate of spinach repassato, cooked with garlic

and oil" (actual quote). We now enter a rather fascinating world of art restoration spiced with biographical details of Caravaggio's life. Is the found painting really Caravaggio's? How do we determine if it is? The book now hits its stride and all the early fluff is forgiven. On balance it is a commendable book of art detection and restoration that is devoid of academic stodginess. Lots of fun once you get past the ocean breezes.

Like "six degrees of separation" everything is somehow connected. How my brother -- who once asked me to explain THE TAKING OF CHRIST during a visit to the National Gallery in Dublin -- came to be reading this book is one of the mysteries of being a sibling. (His curiosity always surprises me.) In any case, I swiped it away from him during a Xmas visit before I even realized it was the same painting we had seen in Dublin. What could be more fun than to read about the intense and passionate discovery of a lost Caravaggio painting, made by two young Italian art students just starting out?! It is engagingly written and reads like a detective novel, with many fulsome descriptions of all the players such as the difficult Italian woman who holds the old sales books for the original painting, the elderly art historian who guides the young Francesca on her painstaking discovery, the priests in whose home the painting is discovered, the patroness who bequeathed it to them, and above all the restorer who identifies THE TAKING OF CHRIST and is overwhelmed by its power, both as an art discovery and as a gem of prestige. There's enough information about the painter and man Caravaggio and the world in which he worked and played to entice even the least art history oriented reader.

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