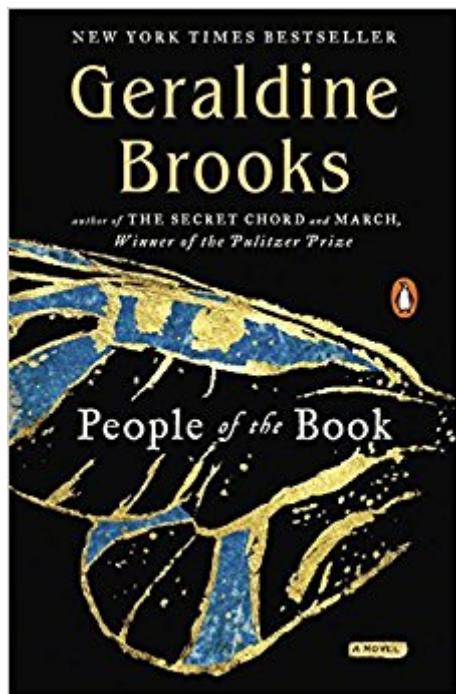


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# People Of The Book: A Novel



## Synopsis

The bestselling novel that follows a rare manuscript through centuries of exile and war, from the author of *The Secret Chord* and *March*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. Inspired by a true story, *People of the Book* is a novel of sweeping historical grandeur and intimate emotional intensity by an acclaimed and beloved author. Called "a tour de force" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, this ambitious, electrifying work traces the harrowing journey of the famed Sarajevo Haggadah, a beautifully illuminated Hebrew manuscript created in fifteenth-century Spain. When it falls to Hanna Heath, an Australian rare-book expert, to conserve this priceless work, the series of tiny artifacts she discovers in its ancient binding—an insect wing fragment, wine stains, salt crystals, a white hair—only begin to unlock its deep mysteries and unexpectedly plunges Hanna into the intrigues of fine art forgers and ultra-nationalist fanatics.

## Book Information

Paperback: 372 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (December 30, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143115006

ISBN-13: 978-0143115007

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.7 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 1,175 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #11,717 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Jewish #45 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Jewish #47 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Australia & Oceania

## Customer Reviews

Best of the Month, January 2008: One of the earliest Jewish religious volumes to be illuminated with images, the Sarajevo Haggadah survived centuries of purges and wars thanks to people of all faiths who risked their lives to safeguard it. Geraldine Brooks, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *March*, has turned the intriguing but sparely detailed history of this precious volume into an emotionally rich, thrilling fictionalization that retraces its turbulent journey. In the hands of Hanna Heath, an impassioned rare-book expert restoring the manuscript in 1996 Sarajevo, it yields clues to its guardians and whereabouts: an insect wing, a wine stain, salt crystals, and a white hair. While

readers experience crucial moments in the book's history through a series of fascinating, fleshed-out short stories, Hanna pursues its secrets scientifically, and finds that some interests will still risk everything in the name of protecting this treasure. A complex love story, thrilling mystery, vivid history lesson, and celebration of the enduring power of ideas, *People of the Book* will surely be hailed as one of the best of 2008. --Mari Malcolm --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

Reading Geraldine Brooks's remarkable debut novel, *Year of Wonders*, or more recently *March*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, it would be easy to forget that she grew up in Australia and worked as a journalist. Now in her dazzling new novel, *People of the Book*, Brooks allows both her native land and current events to play a larger role while still continuing to mine the historical material that speaks so ardently to her imagination. Late one night in the city of Sydney, Hanna Heath, a rare book conservator, gets a phone call. The Sarajevo Haggadah, which disappeared during the siege in 1992, has been found, and Hanna has been invited by the U.N. to report on its condition. Missing documents and art works (as Dan Brown and Lev Grossman, among others, have demonstrated) are endlessly appealing, and from this inviting premise Brooks spins her story in two directions. In the present, we follow the resolutely independent Hanna through her thrilling first encounter with the beautifully illustrated codex and her discovery of the tiny signs-a white hair, an insect wing, missing clasps, a drop of salt, a wine stain-that will help her to discover its provenance. Along with the book she also meets its savior, a Muslim librarian named Karaman. Their romance offers both predictable pleasures and genuine surprises, as does the other main relationship in Hanna's life: her fraught connection with her mother. In the other strand of the narrative we learn, moving backward through time, how the codex came to be lost and found, and made. From the opening section, set in Sarajevo in 1940, to the final section, set in Seville in 1480, these narratives show Brooks writing at her very best. With equal authority she depicts the struggles of a young girl to escape the Nazis, a duel of wits between an inquisitor and a rabbi living in the Venice ghetto, and a girl's passionate relationship with her mistress in a harem. Like the illustrations in the Haggadah, each of these sections transports the reader to a fully realized, vividly peopled world. And each gives a glimpse of both the long history of anti-Semitism and of the struggle of women toward the independence that Hanna, despite her mother's lectures, tends to take for granted. Brooks is too good a novelist to belabor her political messages, but her depiction of the Haggadah bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims could not be more timely. Her gift for storytelling, happily, is timeless.

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The chronology of this book is somewhat hard to follow. I actually had to review the book and read certain parts a second time to get a full understanding of what was going on. Almost too many stories in this one novel! It might have been helpful to read the "Afterword" first!! Yet, the writing is very good, and Brooks' imagination is wonderful. I learned much about the real Sarajevo Haggadah, and I learned much about the history of Judaism inter-twined with Islam in Europe over the last centuries.. I found this a worthwhile read. This is the first Brooks' novel I have read.

This book is such a glowing example of words making pictures. I had read this book and suggested it to my book club. One of the ladies said she had read it already. I responded, "Didn't you love the illustrations?""There weren't any illustrations in my book!"I was so surprised by her answer than I decided to read it again. There were only vivid descriptions in the book. I only had illustrations in my mind!"

I found the details of book restoration to be very interesting. As a librarian, it boggles my mind that a 500 year old book even exists! Using physical clues within the book to reveal its history was an engaging way to tell its history in a non-linear fashion. As is typical in her novels, however, the ending was too abrupt, as if the editor had said "times up, pencils down." Over all, a very good read.

The story is quite complex made even more so by the switches between narrators and time periods. However, the underlying history of a Jewish book which escaped burning during the Inquisition, the exile of the Jews from Spain, and other historical events, including Hitler, the Holocaust, and others which should have spelled the end for the book. The key was the passion of various unrelated persons who risked their lives to save it. The novel is based on a true incident however, the individual vignettes were creative fiction invented to answer the unanswerable question of how it could have happened. It held my attention and always seemed to be rooted in real people. I've been interested in history and especially the history of the Jews during their diaspora. I think anyone with a similar interest will find the book provides details of that period which are less available than books that concentrate on World War II. I highly recommend it. Its worth the sometimes struggle of trying to keep up with the back and forth of time and place.

Very well written and interesting story about an actual book, the Sarajevo Haggadah. An Australian book conservator is asked to examine the book and finds tiny clues that hint about the book's

passage through time and different owners. Alternating chapters reveal the secrets of the book and how these artifacts wound up in it.

This is an ambitious work, tracing the history of a beautiful sacred Jewish text, recovered in the ruins of Sarajevo in 1996 and restored through the careful craftsmanship of a book restorer named Hanna. During her work, she notes certain clues to its history: a wine stain, a white hair, an insect wing, saltwater. From flashbacks, we learn the stories of the individuals who handled the text and ensured its unlikely survival - from Bosnia during World War II, to Vienna in 1894, Venice in 1609, the Inquisition of 1492, back to its creation in Seville in 1480. Along the way, we also learn Hanna's story. I agree with some other reviewers that the relationship between Hanna and her mother strained credulity at times, but the overall novel is so compelling that even that minor flaw did not undermine my appreciation of it.

Interesting fictionalized tale of the Sarajevo Haggadah. Many people who were responsible for preserving the book or who had an impact on it tell their tales in the first person. The violence and any sexual content included in the book were to depict the reality of the times that the people of the book lived in.

Fascinating read, as the author deftly moves the story through generations and locales, always returning to the protagonist who is trying to unravel the mystery of the books origin. Creatively mastered and very well written, in fact gut-wrenching in parts where anti-Semitism is described. Truly a worthwhile read.

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